

# **Walter Macken (1915-1967) – Playwright, Actor and Theatre Manager**

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## **Part 1**

**This thesis is submitted for the award of the degree PhD**

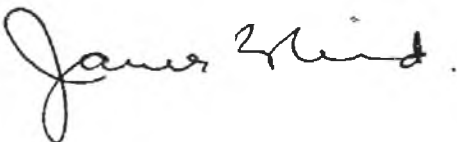
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**July 2010**

I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme of study leading to the award PhD, is entirely my own work and has not been taken from the work of others save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.

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### Part 2

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## **Abstract**

### **Walter Macken, 1915-1967 Playwright, Actor and Theatre Manager**

**James E. Reid B.Sc., M.A.**

This thesis documents the theatre work of Walter Macken and establishes his contribution to Irish theatre as a playwright, actor and theatre manager. The work also provides a view of theatre in mid-twentieth century Ireland.

The research examines his working life as an actor from 1933 when he joined Taibhdhearc na Gaillimhe to his performance in film in 1962. The quality of his performances is examined, based on contemporary reviews by theatre critics and others. It is shown that Macken was an actor within the Irish realistic tradition.

He wrote his first play in the mid-1930s and had a total of 35 titles to his name before his early death in 1967. If we exclude all but his conventional plays, his unfinished musical, *God's Own Country*, and *Recall the Years*, scripted for the opening of the new Abbey Theatre in 1966, his total output is 21 plays including short plays.

Each of the 21 plays is evaluated and discussed in detail, in order to clarify the range and variety of Macken's dramatic imagination, heretofore too often seen as limited. While the novels and short stories do not form the subject of this thesis, it will be shown that the plays are often based upon or relate to the fiction in theme, plot and/ or characterisation. The quality of his performed plays is discussed in the light of criticism by theatre critics writing at the time and the later opinions of other writers on mid-twentieth century Irish playwrights.

Macken spent from 1939 until 1948 as manager of Taibhdhearc na Gaillimhe. He was the second government nominee on the Abbey Board from 1965 until 1966. During this time he was appointed to the positions of assistant manager and artistic adviser and held all three positions until his unexpected resignation in June 1966.

The thesis concludes that as an actor Walter Macken was as much an artist as when he wrote plays or novels. As a playwright he has been seriously underrated and the range of his work under appreciated and in need of re-interpretation.



## Acknowledgements

This work has been described as a 'stand-alone' thesis, which implied, to me at any rate, that I was doing all the work. Nothing could be further from the truth. The task of tracing the professional life of Walter Macken did take time and the help and support of many people. It required some detective skills, a lot of time chasing leads into dusty corners and the labour of pulling all the facts together to produce the full and accurate story.

I start by thanking Dr. Brenna Clarke, Dr. Noreen Doody and Dr Derek Hand from the English Department at St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra, Dr. Mary Shine Thompson, Dean of Research and Humanities at St Patrick's College and her Research administrator, Sharon King. The staff at St. Patrick's Cregan Library were always a great resource and always helpful.

Next I mention Mairéad Delaney, Archivist, with the Abbey Theatre (Amharclann na Mainistreach). She provided me with excellent support for my work. She also organised for me to have contact with the former Abbey players, Patrick Laffan and Clive Geraghty whom I thank for their help. The former Director of the Abbey Theatre, Tomás Mac Anna, was particularly helpful and answered all my questions fully. The special collections department of the James Hardiman Library at the National University of Ireland, Galway, were very accommodating and I would like to thank especially Kieran Hoare for his willingness to provide me with copies of materials from the Taibhdhearc archive. Mary Qualter at the Galway County Libraries, Island House, was very helpful. My thanks also go to the former Minister for the Arts, Michael D. Higgins from Galway.

It was a particular pleasure for me to meet and record the memories of the former Taibhdhearc na Gaillimhe players, Éamonn Mach Dhonnchadha (Eamon McDonagh), Mairead Concannon (formerly Ní Fhloinn) and Íde Ní Mhathúna (Ita O'Mahony). Their accounts of working with Walter Macken gives us a picture of the way the Taibhdhearc was run and the commitments of those involved to provide theatre in Irish.

This work ranged beyond the expected English-speaking countries. I received relevant materials from Sweden, the Riksteatern and Sveriges Teatermuseum (the Theatre Museum of Sweden), from the Norwegian National Library in Oslo and Det Norske Teatret and from the Hamburger Kammerspiele in Germany

I received willing support with translations from some of my ex-IAESTE colleagues, Carola Barhammar in Sweden, Bård Sve Wallentinsen in Norway, Renate Heine in Germany and Elsa van der Kooi in the Netherlands. Caoimhín Ó hIcí, Oifigigeach na Gaeilge, St. Patrick's College, translated the 1 Act play, *Bhi Mac Agam Tráth*, for me. I would also like to thank the cultural offices at the Embassies in Ireland of Belgium, Norway, Sweden and the Netherlands for their help.

My contacts with theatre bodies in Australia always received prompt attention and I would like to thank Maitland Repertory Company, National Institute of Dramatic Art (NIDA), State Library of Western Australia in Perth, National Library of Australia and the National Film and Sound Archive. Closer to home were The Citizens Theatre

and Scottish Theatre Archive, Liverpool Records Office and Eibhlín Ní Oisín, Information Manager, RTE Reference Library.

I am especially grateful to The Holding Court Theatre Group, Ballymun, Dublin 9. They gave me first hand experience with an early Walter Macken play (**Footnote 6.2**). I directed the group in the first public performances of *Salute the Servant*, a translation of *An Cailín Aimsire Abu*, at the Axis Theatre in Ballymun in May 2009 and later the production won the adjudicator's award at the Acting Irish International Theatre Festival in Winnipeg, Canada. My thanks go to Michael Byrne, (Producer), Joan Nolan, (Stage Manager), Frances Blackburn, (Costumes) and the players, Linda Hayden, Neasa McCann, Robbie Sexton, Declan Kidd, Catherine Barry, Leslie McShane, Michael Inglis, Joe Murphy. I would also like to thank Michael Byrne for access to his collection of theatre programmes, **Picture 4.9**.

The sons of Walter Macken, Fr. Walter and Ultan, were especially helpful in the early days and I was delighted that Ultan allowed me to read and comment on the early drafts of his biography on his father, *Dreams on Paper*, published in 2009. Tom Kenny, Macken's nephew, gave me access to his files on Walter Macken and showed an encouraging interest in my research.

Walter Macken's own papers, manuscripts, correspondence, etc., were sold in 1977 to the Bergische Universität Wuppertal, Germany. I was delighted and very impressed with the openness and interest the University showed in my work. The Library placed at my disposal the whole Macken archive. I am especially indebted to Dr. Anja Platz-Schliebs, Fachreferentin für Anglistik, Romanistik und Pädagogik, for her generous help and also to her colleague, Dr. Peter Blume. The library staff offered me practical assistance when needed and my thanks to Herr Claus Tillmann, Librarian, who looks after the archive at the Universitätsbibliothek.

The course director during my MA years at St. Patrick's College was Dr. Patrick Burke. Dr. Burke who encouraged me in this direction and as my supervisor he was helpful, constructive and always available whenever needed. He took great care with the many drafts of the work I presented to him and I valued very much his comments and advice.

I reserve my last words of thanks for my family. My sisters, Margaret McCaffrey, RIP, and Florence Connolly, living in Galway were convenient and obliging. They provided me with accommodation and food during my many visits to the NUIG special collection, the loan of a car when needed and Margaret introduced me to her near neighbour the former Taibhdhearc player, Mairead Concannon. I also thank my brother, Michael who procured for me a copy of the film, *The Quare Fellow*.

Finally, I thank Mary Reid for her patience. Living with me and Walter Macken for the best part of four years has somewhat disrupted my normal life pattern as well as making my conversations fairly predictable. It has also disrupted family events and holidays were worked around my research commitments. Thank you for your understanding, for reading the occasional draft and for Irish translations from time to time.

## **Walter Macken (1915-1967) – Playwright, Actor and Theatre Manager**

### **Objective**

The purpose is to provide a complete account of the professional work for the theatre of Walter Macken. It will establish his contribution to Irish theatre through his work as a playwright, actor, theatre director and theatre manager.

The research will examine his working life in the theatre and document his contribution under the following headings:

- The extent of his writings for the theatre: his known and unpublished works, the works finished and unfinished, and allow for a full and detailed understanding of his contribution as a playwright.
- The relationship between his plays and his other fiction in theme, plot and/ or characterisation.
- His performances as an actor in Ireland and overseas, reviewing the published criticisms of his performances and the views of some of those who worked with him.
- His performance as a theatre manager in Galway and Dublin.
- The stageworthiness of Macken's plays for presentation to twenty-first-century audiences in the light of the criticism his plays received at the time and later from other writers on mid-twentieth century playwrights.

### **Background**

Nothing approaching a significant account has been written about Walter Macken's contributions to Irish theatre as a playwright, actor or theatre director or manager.

When starting this work I had established that Walter Macken had written eleven plays <sup>1</sup>. Of these, four remain unpublished though two of the unpublished plays had received professional productions, *Look in the Looking Glass*, by the Abbey Theatre in 1958 and *The Voices of Doolin* by Cyril Cusack Productions in the Gaiety Theatre in 1960.

Descriptions of some of Macken's English language plays are to be found in Welch <sup>2</sup> and Hogan <sup>3</sup>. Catherine Rynne in McCann <sup>4</sup> confines her comments to his play, *Home is the Hero*. Robert Hogan describes five of the plays and is by far the most thorough in that he tracks the development of the Macken plays from *Mungo's Mansion* (1946) through to *The Voices of Doolin* (1960). Hunt <sup>5</sup> makes passing mention of two of the plays. There are occasional listings and other comments on Macken's work in theatre publications but it is not unusual to find publications such as *A Readers Guide to Modern Irish Drama* <sup>6</sup> that make no mention of the Macken plays. The only reference to his plays written in Irish can be found in *Stair Dhrámaíochta na Gaeilge* by Pádraig Ó'Siadhail <sup>7</sup>.

In recent years there have been no articles or reports in the newspapers or other publications about Walter Macken other than infrequent remembrances in the Galway papers. He has disappeared almost completely from the Irish theatre scene.

## **Methodology**

The purpose of this work is to provide a complete account of the professional work for the theatre of Walter Macken. This embraces his contribution to Irish theatre as a playwright, actor, theatre director/ manager. Priority is given to his writings for the theatre and his performances as an actor.

Though Walter Macken was an actor and playwright that came to national prominence during his life-time little has been written about his overall contribution to Irish theatre. The performances of his published plays have received attention from some writers. No complete account exists that identifies and provides a critical examination of his whole body of work for the theatre, his plays, and his performances as an actor and theatre manager.

Crucial to the identification of his career as a writer, actor and manager is the identification of credible sources of information. Having located such sources, the collection of relevant information, the analysis of the information and cross-checking the facts is essential before drawing any conclusion on the worth of his work or the quality of his performances.

The research required working with established sources of information, the National Library of Ireland, University archives, private collections and the owners of the Macken archive in Germany, and personal recollections.

A chronologically accurate account of his professional work will allow for his career development as a writer and actor to be seen. Based on the criticism of his plays and performances from a variety of sources, mainly theatre critics and reviewers, a conclusion will be reached on the quality of his writings for the theatre and the quality of his acting. The facts surrounding his two periods as a theatre manager will be identified and his contribution assessed.

## **Sources**

The main sources for my research are:

### **1. The National Library of Ireland (NLI)**

The NLI in its manuscript section has references to Macken in materials supplied to it by the Abbey theatre. This includes an original manuscript of his unpublished play *Look in the Looking Glass* (1958) <sup>8</sup> and the manuscripts of his published plays, *Mungo's Mansion* (1946) <sup>9</sup> and *Twilight of a Warrior* (1953) <sup>10</sup>. They also have Part 1 only of *Recall the Years* (1966) <sup>11</sup>, at the time wrongly assigned to the Yeats collection. There are other passing references in the Abbey albums and scrapbook.

The O'Casey papers include correspondence with Cyril Cusack on Cusack's suggestion to cast Macken as Fr. Boheroe in *The Bishop's Bonfire* (1954) <sup>12</sup>. A copy of Macken's fourth Irish-language play, *An Fear ón Spidéal* (1945), is in the Books and Periodicals section.

Otherwise, materials, available for public consultation, mentioning Macken are in other collections and amount to references to Macken's plays or correspondence with Macken <sup>13, 14</sup>.

## **2. Ultan and Walter Macken (Fr.).**

Walter Macken's sons have materials relevant to their father's working life. Fr. Walter Macken appears to be more interested in the plays and novels while Ultan has since 1981 expressed an interest in writing a biography of his father. This would be more a family history. I met Ultan in July 2006 to discuss my proposed research into his father's theatre contribution and at the end of that year Ultan allowed me access to two folders of letters and personal family items. The letters in the main, apart from the close family letters, are to distant family members, theatre and other contacts and also with Macken's publisher, Macmillan and Co. This material was useful but is, unfortunately, incomplete due to the sale of the bulk of the immediate Macken family archive to the Bergische Universität Wuppertal, Germany, in 1977.

In 2008 Ultan Macken informed me that he had started his biography on his father. He allowed me to read the developing manuscript and provided me with a final draft in 2009. The book, called *Walter Macken: Dreams on Paper* was published in September 2009 by Mercier Press <sup>15</sup>. Described as a personal memoir, the book draws on the author's memories of his parents and those of his brother and is structured around the many letters written to and by Walter Macken and his wife Peggy, to immediate family members and to distant cousins. It also draws heavily on his father's correspondence with his publisher, Macmillan and Co. Ltd., and his agents and publishers in the USA.

This publication proved useful, putting into the public domain some material that supported my own research. My thesis is solely concerned with providing a complete account of Walter Macken's professional theatre life and his writings for the theatre. The biography does not impinge on the integrity or originality of this work. An example of our differing approaches would be the work reference Macken received from Frank Dermody when he left the Taibhdhearc in 1937. In *Dreams on Paper* the reference is quoted (2009, 122) while I saw the document as an item of theatre history and reproduce a copy of the original letter (**Appendix 1.6**). All known references to the Macken work, his plays and performances, throughout this thesis are supported with the necessary detail to ensure the reader has a complete view of the individual events.

### 3. The **Bergische Universität Wuppertal**, Germany

The Bergische Universität Wuppertal purchased in 1977 the bulk of Walter Macken's papers and manuscripts. The sale was done on behalf of Macken's widow Peggy Macken (formerly Kenny) and was arranged by her brother, Desmond Kenny, Kenny's Bookshop, Galway.

It is estimated that about 12,000 pages (number of pages mentioned by Ultan Macken but not confirmed) of the Macken family archive were sold at this time. These papers are available at the Universitätsbibliothek, Wuppertal and **Appendix 0.1** is a summary of the contents.

This is an extensive archive and contains as well as manuscripts of some of Macken's popular novels and short stories, copies of his known plays e.g. *Home is the Hero*, and original scripts for a range of other plays previously unknown outside the family. It also contains an original, if incomplete, copy of Walter Macken's autobiography. This covers the years from his early school days until his first departure from Taibhdhearc na Gaillimhe in 1937. Outside of the written work, the archive contains correspondence and theatre programmes from his time in the Taibhdhearc and the Abbey Theatre, letters from the 1950s referring to



his American experiences, papers referring to his appointment to the Abbey Board, some Abbey Theatre manager's reports, meeting minutes, etc., from 1965 and 1966. It also contains correspondence regarding the performances of his plays in other countries. There is an extensive collection of press cuttings.

The papers are organised in more than 100 folders. The summary in **Appendix 0.1** is on one page while the full index runs to 83 pages. These materials have been essential to my development of a definitive account of the professional theatre life of Walter Macken.

Bergische Universität Wuppertal material is referenced throughout this work using the abbreviation, BUW, followed by the folder number.

#### **4. The James Hardiman Library Special Collection at National University of Ireland, Galway (NUIG).**

Taibhdhearc na Gaillimhe donated its archive to the NUIG Special Collection in 1990. This, though incomplete in itself, had its Taibhdhearc programme collection virtually completed with the donation of the Christopher Townley programme collection and other Taibhdhearc papers in 2006. Christopher Townley was the Librarian at University College Galway, now NUIG. He retired in 1982. He was also a former Taibhdhearc player and Board member.

The collection contains Taibhdhearc programmes, posters, a photograph collection, much correspondence and the Taibhdhearc Board meeting minutes (incomplete). The missing Board meeting minutes are for the period 1932 to April 1939.

#### **5. The Tom Kenny Collection.**

Tom Kenny is the nephew of Peggy Kenny, Walter Macken's wife and the son of Desmond Kenny who arranged the sale of the Macken papers to Wuppertal. Tom is responsible for the Kenny Art Gallery in Galway.



Over the years Tom Kenny has compiled a private collection of materials from Taibhdhearc na Gaillimhe and on Walter Macken. This includes a photograph collection, mainly Macken family photos and promotional cast photographs from the Taibhdhearc including some from Macken's time (1939-1948) when he was actor/ manager. There is some correspondence, press cuttings, reviews of the Macken books and plays and Macken commemoration materials. There is also a transcript of a recorded conversation between Ultan Macken (at the time working as a journalist with RTE) and his mother Peggy Macken (Kenny) made for the RTE *Cursai* programme. This was broadcast on the 5 April 1988 (21 years after Walter Macken's death).

The Tom Kenny collection complements material already collected and provides an alternative view of some of the events. It is referenced here as the Tom Kenny collection.

#### **6. The Ernest Blythe collection at University College Dublin, Archive Department**

Ernest Blythe was a director of the Abbey Theatre and also the manager from 1941 to his retirement in 1967 (see also **Footnote 3.1**). As manager it was his practice to provide to the other directors a regular 'Manager's Report'. These reports detail activities at the theatre and include comments on the financial situation, plays in rehearsal and being performed, audience size, etc. They also contained, from time to time, observations on individual performances of the Abbey players and behaviours.

Many of these reports are to be found in the Ernest Blythe papers deposited in the UCD Archives Department. The collection is indexed P24. The Manager's Reports date from 1947 and provides a further view on Abbey activities, an 'insiders' view. The reports cover work periods of between 10 days and 1 month but more normally are for periods of 2 to 3 weeks. Verbatim extracts from these

reports are used particularly in Chapters 3, 4 and 5 and are identified by the appropriate UCD archives reference.

## **7. The Abbey Theatre Archives**

Early in 2008 I contacted the Abbey Theatre requesting access to their archives, in particular the Manager's Reports, the minutes of Board meetings and minutes of Annual General Meetings. I was told that the Abbey Theatre was a private company and that the mentioned documents were confidential and not available to the public. Following the intervention of an independent third party, I was informed that I would be granted access to the papers in November 2008. In April 2009 I received the *Conditions of Access to the Abbey Theatre Minute Books* which I signed. The main concern of the Theatre is contained in one paragraph in the access document:

The Abbey Theatre Minute Books contain occasional references of a private nature to named individuals related to or employees of the Abbey Theatre. These records would in modern times be classified as personnel records and would be closed to public access. Individuals referred to in this manner must not be named or referred to in such a way as to reveal their identity.

The Archivist also requested that I specify the dates during which Macken was involved with the theatre so that the material for inspection could be separated from the bulk of the archive and examined beforehand. The dates all relate to Macken correspondence with the theatre from the early 1940s, his time there as an actor and his return to the Abbey Theatre as a Director in 1965. Some of these years are partially covered in the Ernest Blythe papers in the UCD Archive Department. Finally, I am to provide a copy of my final thesis to the Abbey Theatre for inclusion in their collection of research materials.

The Abbey archive is held privately on behalf of the Theatre at the National Library of Ireland. The Abbey Theatre minute books are Accession 3961/ NFC 98 (NFC = Not for Consultation). Any material used from this collection is identified as NFC 98 with the Volume number and/ or the relevant date. The minute book contains the manager's reports. My letter of access allowed me to consult the archive without restriction.

### **8. Newspapers and Periodicals**

Local, national and international newspapers, periodicals and magazines from the time when Macken was active in the theatre have proved an invaluable resource. They contributed information, reviews, articles and interviews on and about Walter Macken and his theatre work. Where quoted, in full or as extracts, the accounts are verbatim and referenced to the original newspaper or publication.

### **9. Other sources**

These include, (apart from ongoing conversations with the immediate Macken family) conversations with past players who worked with Macken in his various capacities, the Dublin City Archives, Galway County Libraries, various websites, etc. Appropriate references are made throughout to these sources.

## References:

- <sup>1</sup> Reid, James. *Walter Macken (1915-1967) – Playwright, Actor and Theatre Manager*. MA thesis, St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra, 2007
- <sup>2</sup> Welch, Robert. *The Abbey Theatre, 1899-1999: Form and Pressure*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 1999 (pages 158, 159)
- <sup>3</sup> Hogan, Robert. *After the Irish Renaissance*. London: Macmillan and Co, 1968 (pages, 65-70)
- <sup>4</sup> McCann, Sean, ed. *The Story of the Abbey Theatre*. London: The New English Library, 1967 (page 94)
- <sup>5</sup> Hunt, Hugh. *The Abbey, Ireland's National Theatre, 1904-1979*. Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1979 (pages 171,182)
- <sup>6</sup> Sternlicht, Sanford. *A Reader's Guide to Modern Irish Drama*. Syracuse, USA: Syracuse University Press, 1998
- <sup>7</sup> Ó'Siadhail, Pádraig. *Stair Dhrámaíocht na Gaeilge*. Indreabhán, Conamara: Cló Iar-Connachta , 1993 (page 113)
- <sup>8</sup> NLI: MS 29334
- <sup>9</sup> NLI: MS 29447
- <sup>10</sup> NLI: MS 29335
- <sup>11</sup> NLI: MS 29555
- <sup>12</sup> NLI: MS38060/1
- <sup>13</sup> NLI: MS 24902, Matthew O'Mahony papers for 1933-1956
- <sup>14</sup> NLI: MS collection list 79, Patricia Lynch and R. M. Fox papers, 1919-1972
- <sup>15</sup> Macken, Ultan. *Walter Macken: Dreams on Paper*. Cork: Mercier Press, 2009

## Introduction

Walter Macken was born in Galway on 3rd May 1915, the youngest child of Walter Stephen Macken and Agnes Brady. They were not a well-off family. Family circumstances had determined this from the time of the death of his grandfather.

His grandfather, also Walter, was Chief Forester at the Ashford Castle estate in Cong, Co. Mayo. His grandmother, Mary, worked there as a cook. The job gave the family a free house. Walter and Mary had ten children, the eldest of these being Walter Stephen Macken (b.1888), the father of Walter Macken. The reason for the early death of his grandfather is not known but its consequences were tragic for the family. Mary lost the house and with her children lived locally for a time in extreme poverty. Walter Stephen was convicted of begging (Macken, 2009, 16) and he and one brother were committed to the Letterfrack Reformatory School near Clifden in 1897. His two other brothers were sent there later that year. No information is available on the fate of his six sisters. Walter Stephen trained as a carpenter at Letterfrack and was discharged from the Reformatory School in 1904. He went to work in Galway City.

Walter Stephen married Agnes Brady from Ballygill, Ballinasloe, Co Galway <sup>16</sup> in 1911. Agnes was working in Galway City at the Racquet Court, a licensed premises and dance hall in Middle Street. They had three children, Eileen b.1912, Noreen b.1913 and Walter b.1915. (**Footnote 0.1**)

Walter Stephen worked as a carpenter for Emersons, the Galway builders, for about 10 years and was 'let go' in June 1915. To support his family he joined the British army and after a period training in England, near Dover, he was sent to France. Private W. Macken of the Royal Fusiliers was reported missing, almost certainly killed at St. Eloi on 28 March 1916.

**Footnote 0.1:** He was also a locally known amateur actor. *The Galway Pilot & Vindicator* reporting on the 19 October 1912, second page, mentions 'Mr. Macken as Dr. Bunbury, was a first class character. He played the part with great tact and ability, and a thorough appreciation of the requirements of the piece.' The play was *The Eloquent Dempsey* by William Boyle (1853-1914) and the performance was at the St Augustine's Hall. The play was first performed at the Abbey Theatre in 1906 (Robinson, 1951, 78).

Walter Stephen Macken's death is remembered on the Ypres (Menin Gate) Memorial in Ypres in West Flanders <sup>17</sup>.

**Picture 0.1**



Walter Stephen Macken, 1888 – 1916

This photograph was sent to Mary, his mother, by Walter Stephen from France. It is a post card photograph and written on the back is:

“This photograph was taken in Dover in 1915 on the eve of his departure to France...” <sup>18</sup>

A copy of the full text is reproduced in **Appendix 0.2**

The death of Walter Stephen Macken was reported in the local Galway newspapers. Copies of the reports are in **Appendix 0.3**.

Walter Macken (b.1915) went to primary school at the Presentation Convent, Galway and completed his primary education at St. Joseph's National School, Nun's Island, Galway. His secondary education was at St. Joseph's Seminary (now St Joseph's Patrician College) though he did attend St. Mary's College, Galway for one year. <sup>19, 20, 21, 22</sup>

The school records at St. Joseph's College indicate <sup>23</sup> that he first attended the school from 1928 to 1930, he then left to St Mary's College for one year and returned to St.

Joseph's in 1931 and joined the Intermediate Certificate class. He successfully passed the Intermediate Certificate examination in 1932 and completed his secondary education at St. Joseph's. He became involved with Taibhdhearc na Gaillimhe in 1932 while still attending school and worked there in a part-time capacity. He completed his School Leaving Certificate in 1934. He was just over 19 years old at the time and received an Honours Certificate<sup>24</sup>. (Appendix 0.4)

The Macken family lived at this time in 18, St. Joseph's Terrace (off Henry Street), a Galway Corporation house. They later moved to a larger house in St. Helen's Street where his mother kept lodgers<sup>25</sup>. Work opportunities in Galway were limited and it seems that Walter did not aspire to attend university. Based on his Leaving Certificate results this may not have been possible, though an appropriate Leaving Certificate was accepted as an examination exempting candidates from the Matriculation examination. Mathematics was a prescribed subject and Macken's Leaving Certificate did not include Mathematics. Within the Matriculation Regulations at the time there was

“...exemption from further examination in the subject of Mathematics at the Matriculation Examination on account of a Pass in that subject at Senior Grade Intermediate Examination<sup>26</sup>...”

Macken achieved an average 44% over his three Mathematic subjects in his Intermediate Certificate in 1932. There would also have been the questions of the college fees for University College Galway in 1934 and whether his Leaving Certificate results would have entitled him to a scholarship<sup>27</sup>.

The family income must have been modest. Macken in his autobiography (Footnote 0.2, page 13) mentions a pension for his mother of £2-6-8 per week

“... that included something for herself and a few shillings a head for the three children”<sup>28</sup>.

Walter was offered a clerical position with Galway Corporation. Encouraged by his mother he accepted the position but he was clearly dissatisfied with the work. He left the job and, either immediately or shortly afterwards, accepted a position with the Taibhdhearc with whom he was involved in a part-time capacity since 1932.

It is from 1932 onwards that we examine the theatre life of Walter Macken.

It was at the Taibhdhearc that he met his future wife, Peggy Kenny, who was then News Editor of the *Connacht Tribune*. The couple eloped and were married in Fairview Church in Dublin on February 9th 1937. They moved to London where Macken worked as a door-to door insurance salesman. He wrote about this experience in his novel *I Am Alone*.

Their first child, Walter (Wallyóg) was born on April 10th 1938. The family returned to live in Galway in the summer of 1939 where Macken took up the position of producer, actor, etc., with the Taibhdhearc. He worked there from 1939 to 1948. Their second son, Ultan, was born in September 10th 1943.

In 1948 Walter Macken left the Taibhdhearc and with his family moved to Dublin where he worked for the Abbey Theatre as an actor for almost three years. By this time, he had published two novels, *Quench The Moon* and *I Am Alone* and two plays in English, *Mungo's Mansion* and *Vacant Possession*.

**Footnote 0.2:** BUW Folders 46 and 98 contain two very different versions of *Cockle and Mustard*. The version in Folder 46 is written in the first person. The version in Folder 98 is written in the third person and dated 25 June 1946. Ultan Macken in *Dreams on Paper* reproduces a letter dated 26 October 1946 that refers to Macken submitting a novel with the title *Cockle and Mustard* to Macmillan & Co (2009, 176). It is clear that the version submitted to Macmillan was the one written in the third person. The Folder 98 version contains the characters Joseph and Nancy and they are referred to by name in Macmillan's letter dated the 21 November 1946 and in other letters (2009, 180). The Folder 46 version of *Cockle and Mustard* is a much more interesting story and is clearly written as an autobiography. Folder 46 contains a typed copy of this manuscript. It is 227 typed fools-cap pages and covers Macken's life from his first years at primary school in the Presentation Convent, Galway, to his departure for England in 1937. The autobiography provides a detailed insight into Macken's early life, his school days and his days at Taibhdhearc na Gaillimhe from 1932 to 1937 that complements the factual material available from other sources. There is no evidence to show that this manuscript was submitted to Macmillan. It is from this document that I have quoted when referring to *Cockle and Mustard* in this chapter and in Chapter 1: *At Taibhdhearc na Gaillimhe, 1932-1937*. **Appendix 0.5** is the cover sheet for the manuscript and the manuscript folder from Folder 46. Both refer to the manuscript as "The true tale of Walter Macken" and the hand written cover indicated that it was completed at the Macken Oughterard, Co. Galway home some time after 1951. The family moved there in the late summer of 1951 (2009, 303).



While living in Dublin he began writing *Rain on the Wind*. This novel was published simultaneously in England and the USA in 1950. At that time he was in the USA on a six month tour in the M. J. Molloy play, *The King of Friday's Men*. 1950 seems to have been a pivotal year for Macken that defined, whether consciously or unconsciously, his future as an actor and writer.

The success of *Rain on the Wind* allowed Macken the independence needed to become a full-time writer. He moved to Oughterard, Co. Galway in 1951 and it was there over the next fifteen years that he wrote his other novels, his children's' books, his short stories and his other plays, including *Home is the Hero*, *Twilight of a Warrior*, *Look in the Looking Glass* and *The Voices of Doolin*.

He lived in Oughterard from 1951 to September of 1966<sup>29</sup>, when he moved to the Gaeltacht village of Menlo, three miles from Galway. In the summer of 1965 Macken accepted the Government's nomination to become their second nominee to the Board of the Abbey Theatre and later that year he was also appointed artistic adviser and assistant manager to Ernest Blythe, manager of the Abbey Theatre. In somewhat unclear circumstances he resigned both positions the following summer. His final act with the Abbey was scripting the opening celebration for the return of the Abbey Theatre Company to the new Abbey Theatre, in Lower Abbey Street, after their 15 year exile in the Queen's Theatre. (Footnote 0.3)

The thesis presents chronologically Macken's life in the theatre and his writings for the theatre. The concluding two chapters provide evaluations of his plays and his other writings for the theatre and offer an assessment of his performances and his plays. Chapter 7 also mentions the social and cultural changes taking place during his lifetime that would have influenced his work and the work of other writers in that period, for example, the introduction of censorship, the State and Church commitment to Catholic

**Footnote 0.3:** Curiously, *The Connacht Sentinel* gave front page coverage to Walter Macken's appointment as director of the Abbey Theatre on the 3 August 1965. It also gave front page coverage to his death and funeral tributes as well as an editorial comment (page 2) in the 25 April 1967 edition. Yet, *The Connacht Sentinel* editorial (page 2) on the 19 July 1966 on the opening of the new Abbey Theatre failed to make any mention of Macken, the then, if just retired, artistic adviser, assistant manager and Abbey Theatre director.

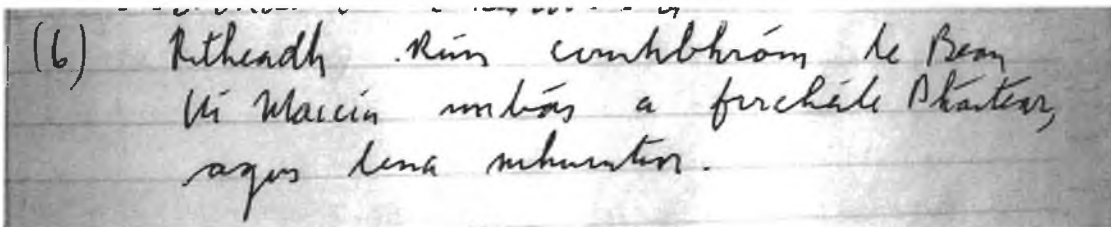
social teaching, the country's isolation during World War II, the State and Church confrontations with the theatre. Walter Macken was a self-taught writer. He had no formal training in acting and his acting skills were acquired when working with Frank Dermody in the Taibhdhearc in the 1930s and at the Abbey Theatre from 1948 to 1950.

Walter Macken died at his home in Menlo on April 22nd 1967 at the age of 51.

His death was widely reported in the international, national, local press<sup>30</sup> and **Appendix 0.6** provides a list of obituaries and appreciations that appeared in the some of the papers at the time.

The Board of Taibhdhearc na Gaillimhe recorded their sympathy on his death to the Macken family in the minutes of their meeting on the 1 May 1967.<sup>31</sup>

**Picture 0.2**



Ernest Blythe's Manager's Report to the Abbey Directors on the 4 May 1967 mentioned that "A resolution of regret at Walter's death was passed at the Shareholders meeting" and suggested "perhaps we should pass a formal resolution at tonight's meeting and write to Mrs. Macken". The Board agreed and "passed a resolution to be conveyed to the widow of Walter Macken expressing their sympathy on the death of a former colleague on the Board of Directors." The resolution was proposed by Mr. Fallon and seconded by Dr. Wilmot.

## References:

- <sup>16</sup> Macken, Walter. *Cockle and Mustard*, Chapter 5, page 36: Bergische Universität Wuppertal (BUW) Folder 46. (Footnote 0.2)
- <sup>17</sup> The Tom Kenny collection and Macken, 2009, 43.
- <sup>18</sup> BUW, folder 17
- <sup>19</sup> Macken, Walter. *Cockle and Mustard*, Chapter 5, pages 108, 109: BUW Folder 46
- <sup>20</sup> Macken, Ultan. *My Father, My Son*, Premiered at Taibhdhearc na Gaillimhe 24 May 2004.
- <sup>21</sup> Ultan Macken, 2009, Chapter 3.
- <sup>22</sup> <http://www.waltermacken.com>
- <sup>23</sup> St. Joseph's Patrician College, Nun's Island, Galway, (school records).
- <sup>24</sup> BUW, Folder 22: Leaving Certificate and Intermediate Certificate examination results
- <sup>25</sup> Cursaí conversation with Peggy Macken, tape 3, page 6, Tom Kenny collection.
- <sup>26</sup> National University of Ireland Calendar, 1932, Part C, page 221
- <sup>27</sup> UCG College Calendar for 1933-1934, page 11- The admission of Students and page 24- Ordinary Entrance Scholarships.
- <sup>28</sup> BUW, Folder 46: *Cockle and Mustard*, Chapter 1, page 14
- <sup>29</sup> *The Connacht Tribune*, 17 July & 7 August 1965 for the sale notice for "Gort na Ganiv". By the direction of Walter Macken, esq,
- <sup>30</sup> BUW Folder 20 and Appendix 0.6
- <sup>31</sup> Taibhdhearc na Gaillimhe Board minutes dated 1 May 1967, NUIG James Hardiman Library, Taibhdhearc Archives, Box T1, item A1 – A8.

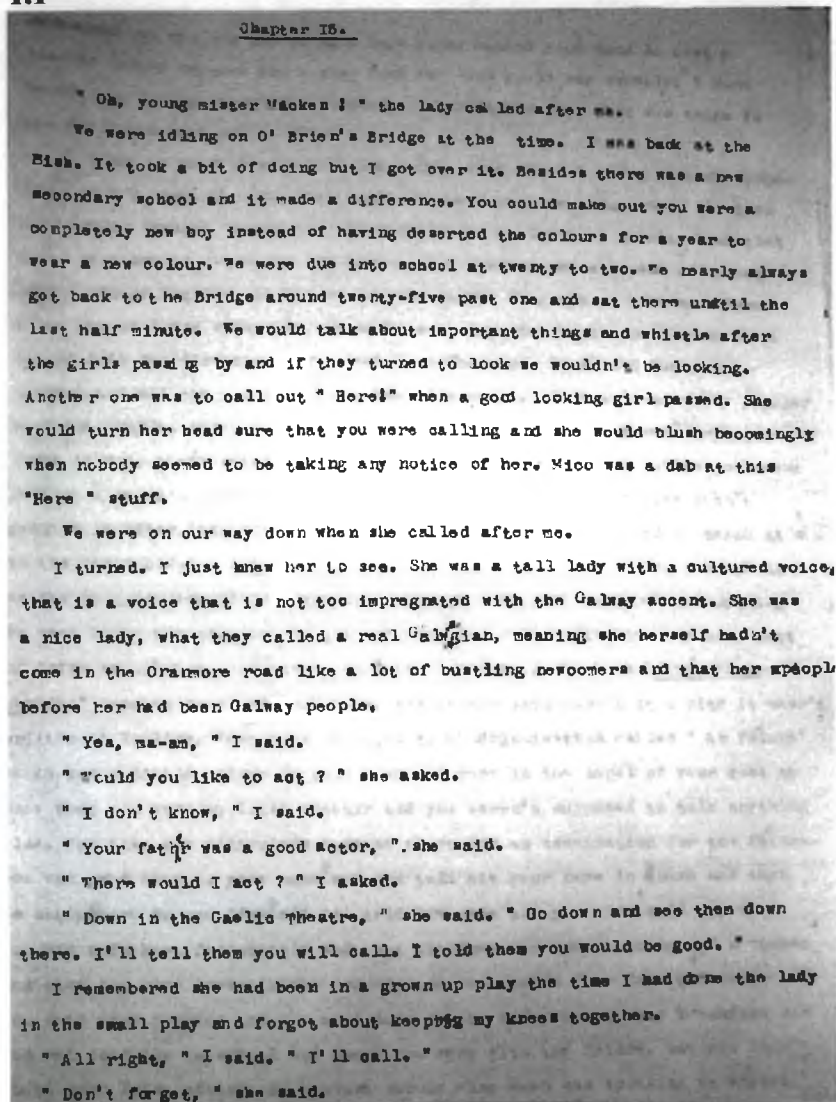
## Chapter 1

### At Taibhdhearc na Gaillimhe, 1932-1937

**“Oh, young Mr. Macken.... Would you like to act?”**

Walter Macken describes in some detail his recruitment to the Taibhdhearc in Chapter 15 of *Cockle and Mustard*<sup>32</sup>. *Cockle and Mustard* (see Footnote 02, page 13) is a fascinating account of Macken's early life up to the time that he left the Taibhdhearc in 1937. The relevant pages describing his introduction to the Taibhdhearc and his first performance there are reproduced in full in **Appendix 1.1** and the following are extracts from these pages.

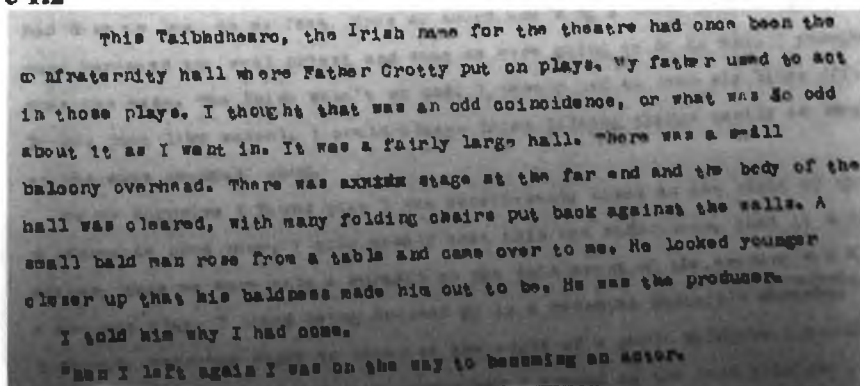
**Picture 1.1**



(Page 111)

The autobiography goes on to describe Macken's first reactions to performance, 'I liked to act. As soon as I put a foot on the stage I got a sort of surge' (Page 112). It gives us a view on his standard of Irish, his attitudes to the language, the hypocrisy of officialdom towards the language, as well as describing his first visit to the Taibhdhearc and his first sight of Frank Dermody.

### Picture 1.2

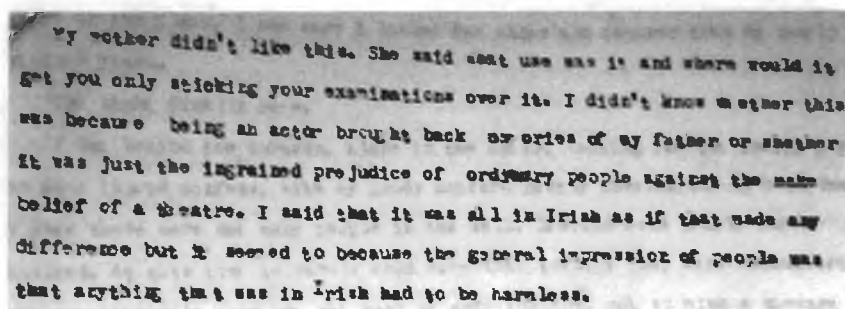


This Taibhdhearc, the Irish name for the theatre had once been the  
a fraternity hall where Father Grotty put on plays. My father used to act  
in those plays. I thought that was an odd coincidence, or what was so odd  
about it as I went in. It was a fairly large hall. There was a small  
balcony overhead. There was a stage at the far end and the body of the  
hall was cleared, with many folding chairs put back against the walls. A  
small bald man rose from a table and came over to me. He looked younger  
closer up than his baldness made him out to be. He was the producer.  
I told him why I had come.

(Page 113)

Macken's mother would appear to have been less than happy with her son's decision to become involved with the theatre. She may also have been influenced by the events that lead to Macken returning to St. Joseph's Secondary School in 1931, the time he lost with the school change (see Introduction, page 11) and the need for him to concentrate on his school work.

### Picture 1.3



My mother didn't like this. She said what use was it and where would it  
get you only sticking your examinations over it. I didn't know whether this  
was because being an actor brought back memories of my father or whether  
it was just the ingrained prejudice of ordinary people against the actor's  
belief of a theatre. I said that it was all in Irish as if that made any  
difference but it seemed to because the general impression of people was  
that anything that was in Irish had to be harmless.

(Page 114)

At the Taibhdhearc Macken immediately came under the influence of the resident producer/ director/ actor, Frank Dermody (the '...small bald man...' mentioned in Picture 1.2).

His first appearance on the Taibhdhairc stage was on the 9 July 1933 in *An Cropaí Óg* (a dramatisation of the ballad, *The Croppy Boy*, translated by Muiris O Cathain). In *Cockle and*

*Mustard* (C & M) he describes in some detail this experience and his anxieties arising from this first introduction to the Taibhdhearc stage. He refers to the play as a 'short piece' and 'a curtain' for the main play (C & M, 114).

*The Connacht Tribune* <sup>33</sup> reported on *An Cropaí Óg* which was supporting the main play, *Good Night, Mr. O'Donnell*, by Riobhárd Ó Braonáin, translated by Professor Liam O' Briain. The reporter remarked on the contrast between the plays, describing *An Cropaí Óg* as '...rather sad' and confirmed that there was a '...good attendance ...'

The players did their parts faultlessly and brought the meaning of all the phrases to the surface.... and the prolonged applause at the end proved that the plays and the production were excellently received.

This is in conflict with Macken's own observations on the audience size. In *Cockle and Mustard* he wrote somewhat wryly on the conclusion of the performance '...there were a few handclaps from the miserable few in the hall...' (C & M, 116)

Macken also mentions his age at the time. 'I am sure I looked older and maturer than my nearly sixteen years' (C & M, 115). With this autobiography appearing to have been written well after the event this is likely to be an understandable error. In July 1933 Macken was over 18 years of age.

In 1990 the Taibhdhearc na Gaillimhe donated its archives to the National University of Ireland, Galway (NUIG), Special Collections, at the James Hardiman Library.

The Taibhdhearc celebrated its 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary in 2003. As part of the Anniversary celebrations the Special Collections Department at NUIG produced a booklet, *75 Years of Taibhdhearc na Gaillimhe* <sup>34a</sup>, describing the history and growth of the Taibhdhearc and a companion booklet, *Na Dramaí a Léiríodh i d'Taibhdhearc na Gaillimhe, 1928 – 2003* <sup>34b</sup>.

Listed in the latter publication are all the productions from the theatre's official opening on 27 August 1928 with *Diarmuid agus Grainne* le Micheál MacLiammóir, Léirithe ag MacLiammóir, to 14 July 2003 and the production of *Scaoil leis an gCaid* le Breandán Mac Gearailt.



The work and works of Walter Macken are mentioned in both publications for the years 1933-1937 and also for 1939 to 1948.

The practice in those early years at the Taibhdhearc was to perform two plays, some times more, for many of their productions. Most had four-day runs and were revived later in the year. Such plays are listed against the same dates in the NUIG list of plays.

In November 1933 Macken appeared in *An Áit a bhfuil an Chrois* (*Where the Cross is Made*) by Eugene O'Neill and *Na Cruiteacháin* (*La Farce des Bossus*) by P. Jalabert.

Macken's association with the Taibhdhearc began in 1932 and by 1933 he was assisting Frank Dermody (Proinnsias Mac Diarmada) (Footnote 1.1) with productions, doing some translations and being a general assistant to the producer.

In December 1933 Macken worked with Dermody on a dramatisation of the Pádraic Mac Piarais story, *Íosagán* in which he played Sean-Mhaitais. He was also responsible for the scenery for both this play and *Scapín na gCleas* (*Les Fourberies de Scapin*) by Molière. Again this was a two play programme.

**Footnote 1.1:** Frank Dermody was the Taibhdhearc producer/ manager, 1931-1938 and an Abbey Theatre, Dublin, producer (director) 1938-1947 and 1956-1978. He was born Chicago, Illinois on the 24 February 1907. After his mother's death the family returned to Ireland. Frank enlisted in the Irish army in 1924. After training in Dublin, he transferred to the Irish-speaking army battalion 'An Chéad Chath Gaelach' in Renmore Barracks, Galway. When Taibhdhearc na Gaillimhe opened in August 1928 with *Diarmuid and Gráinne*, Frank Dermody played the part of Oisín. This was the first production of the play which, translated to English by the author, played at the Gate Theatre, Dublin. The Dublin production was Mac Liammóir's debut as an actor with the Gate Theatre Company<sup>35</sup>. The Board of the Taibhdhearc hoped Mac Liammóir would stay as a director but Mac Liammóir was occupied establishing The Gate Theatre in Dublin. In 1930, Frank Dermody was chosen to go to Dublin to train with Mac Liammóir and Hilton Edwards. In a letter to Ernest Blythe, then the Irish Government's acting Minister of Defence, dated 9 January 1930, the Adjutant General of the Irish Army confirmed 'the attachment of Corporal MacDiarmuda' to his Dublin branch<sup>36a</sup>. Hilton Edwards, on the 8 January 1930, told Blythe 'I will give him every opportunity to study in the theatre. I will take him in hand personally and do my best'<sup>36b</sup>. Dermody, now promoted Sergeant, returned to the Taibhdhearc in January 1931 as producer and stage manager 'at a salary of £2 per week'<sup>36c</sup>. Many in Galway theatrical circles were unhappy in having an ordinary soldier as manager and producer at their theatre. Liam Ó Briain, one of the founders of the Taibhdhearc, and Dermody did not get on. Dermody produced over a 100 plays, mostly translations between 1931 and 1938. The productions were of a high quality. Aodh Mac Dhubháin who translated plays and acted in the Taibhdhearc spoke highly of Dermody (Ó'Siadhail, 1993, 109 & 110). Dermody later became a Board member of the Taibhdhearc. With the help of Walter Macken, Dermody co-wrote the play *Cearú agus Cúiteamh* about Mayor Lynch of Galway who sentenced his own son to be hanged. It was an unqualified success. In November 1938 Dermody was invited to the Abbey Theatre as guest producer. He did not return to the Taibhdhearc. Macken took over the Taibhdhearc position in 1939<sup>37</sup>.

The Connacht Tribune<sup>38</sup> reported on this production by the ‘Juvenile Players’ under the headings:

Taibhdhearc Experiment, Genius of Pearse.

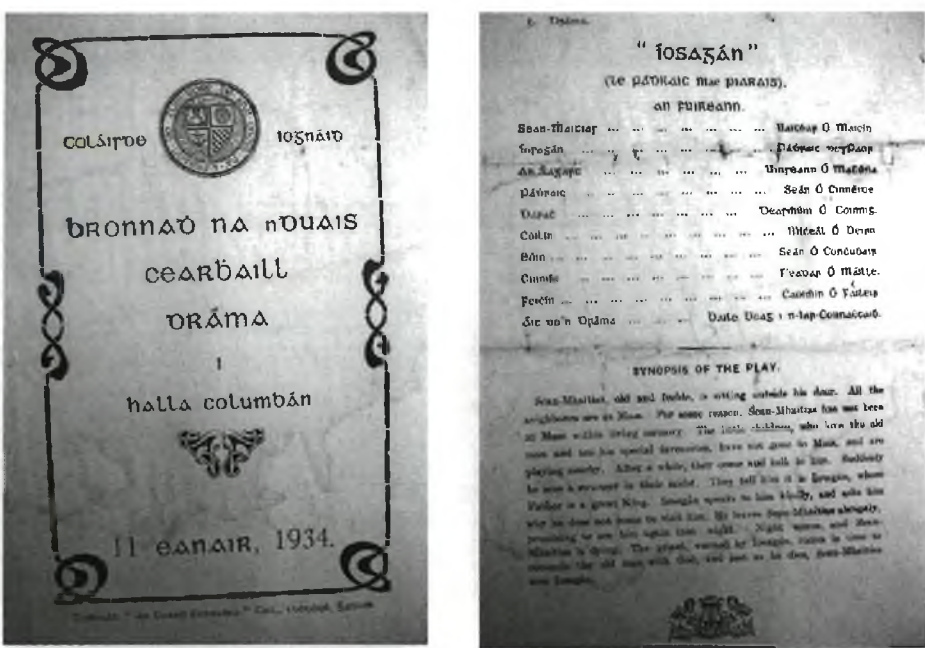
The masterpiece of the performance was the characterisation of Sean-Mhaithias by Uaitéar Ó Maicín. His story to the boys and his death scene were marked with the skill of a true artist.

The reviewer also reported on Macken’s performance in *Scapín na gCleas* as a ‘creditable performance’.

In all, Macken appeared in at least 5 plays in July, November and December 1933. The programmes for these plays are reproduced in **Appendix 1.2**.

*Íosagán* was revived as part of a wider entertainment, organised by Coláiste Iognáid, (the boys in the play were from the Coláiste) in January 1934 at Halla Columbán, Galway, with Macken in the same role.

Picture 1.4



Tom Kenny collection



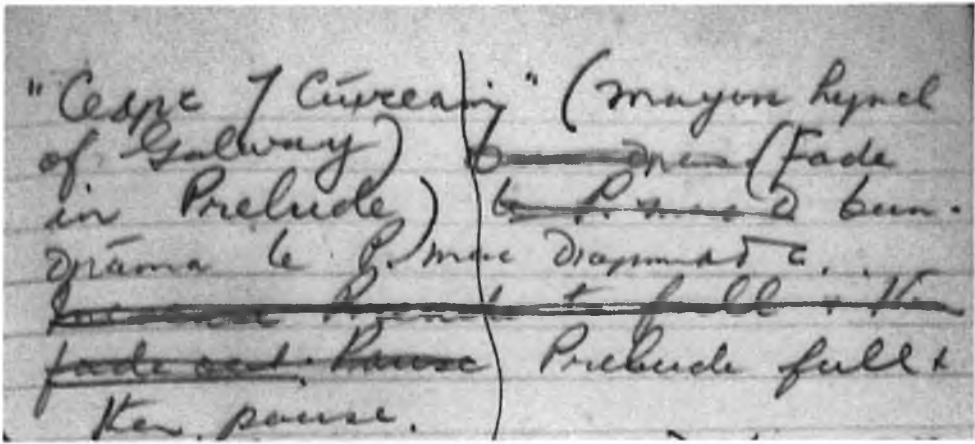
Walter Macken did his School Leaving Certificate in 1934 and his only stage performance that year appears to have been the one at Halla Columbán.

According to the NUIG booklet, Macken co-wrote with Mac Diarmada *Ceart agus Cúiteamh*, a play based on the story of Mayor Lynch of Galway who hanged his son for the murder of a Spaniard. This is not supported by the play programme which records “Proinnsias Mac Diarmada do scriob agus do léirig” (Footnote 1.2). It is nearer the truth to accept that Macken’s did some of the writing with Dermody and deferred to him when it came to claiming authorship. This is supported by the discovery in a hard-backed school copy book in the Wuppertal archive (Folder 62).

The content of the copy book is handwritten and, on first inspection, contains only notes on Irish language lessons, list of proverbs and Irish expressions. At the back of the copybook, written in pencil, are 10 pages writing with the heading *Ceart agus Cúiteamh*.

Picture 1.5 shows the first lines from page 1 and the whole of page 1 reproduced in Appendix 1.3

Picture 1.5



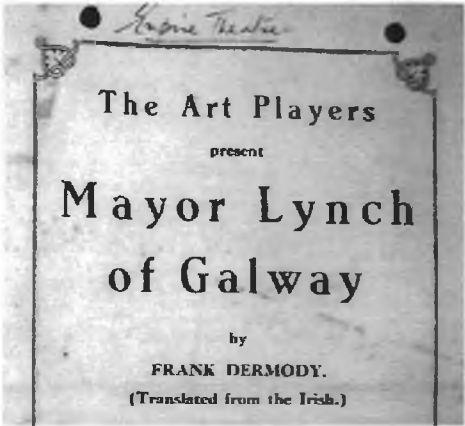
Footnote 1.2: Padriag Ó Siadhail in his book *Stair Dhramaíocht na Gaeilge* mentions that Macken joined the Taibhdhearc ‘mar aisteoir óg ag deireadh 1933’. This is an error. Ó Siadhail does support Macken’s collaboration with Dermody in the writing of *Ceart agus Cúiteamh* (1993, 111). Bateman quotes Ó Siadhail as the source of their information on the ‘collaboration’ between Dermody and Macken.

The play was performed from the 7–10 March 1934. The reviewer in *The Connacht Tribune*<sup>39</sup> wrote

Prionnsias MacDiarmada actor-producer of the Taibhdhearc (who wrote the play) treated a difficult subject in a masterly manner, but the great success of the production was ample recompense for the long arduous weeks spent in writing, pruning and arranging his subject for presentation to the public. This was by no means his first contribution to the work of the Taibhdhearc.

An English-language version was played in October 1935 by The Art Players at the Empire Theatre in Galway with Macken playing the central character, James Lynch Fitz-Stephens.

**Picture 1.6**



(Tom Kenny collection)

The programmes for both versions are reproduced in **Appendix 1.4**.

In 1935 the Galway Corporation decided to commemorate Galway born writer, Pádraig Ó Conaire (**Footnote 1.3**), a pioneer in the Irish Literary Revival at the beginning of the 20th century, by erecting a statue to him in Eyre Square.

**Footnote 1.3:** Padraic Ó Conaire was born in the New Docks area of Galway on February 28th, 1882. He received much of his early education locally. He went to London in 1899 where he got a job with the Board of Education. He involved himself in Gaelic League activities, and he started to write, winning many prizes for his stories and books. He returned to Ireland in 1914, leaving his family behind him. He maintained a precarious enough existence through writing, teaching at Summer Schools in the Gaeltacht and doing some organising work for the Gaelic League. His later years were spent mostly in Galway. He died on 6 October 1928, aged 46. Macken’s boyhood memories of Ó Conaire are recorded in his autobiography (see **Picture 1.7**). O’ Conaire and Padraig Pearse are regarded as being the two most important short story writers in Irish during the first decades of the 20th century.

The Ó Conaire statue was sculpted by Albert Power RHA. It is now in the Galway Museum at the Spanish Arch. The statue was moved to the museum after being decapitated on a number of occasions and it is displayed in a prominent position just inside the museum's front door. Galway Corporation plan to erect a bronze replica to replace the original in the John Fitzgerald Kennedy Memorial Park (formerly Eyre Square) but there is no agreed date for this.

This unveiling of the statue in 1935 was a celebration of some consequence for Galway and it was carried out by Eamon de Valera, President of the Executive Council of the Irish Free State. Mr de Valera was also invited to attend a performance at Taibhdhearc na Gaillimhe organised to coincide with his visit.

Both the unveiling and the Taibhdhearc play were widely reported in the local press<sup>40</sup>.

Picture 1.7



**Brilliant Performance**

**"Bernard de Monthon"**

**TAIBHDHEARC CO.'S SUCCESS**

It is not unusual to see dramatic productions commanding a certain amount of success solely on the strength of the spectacular in their composition. In "The Marvellous Life of St. Bernard de Monthon," Professor Liam O'Bráin's adaptation into Irish of Henri Ghéon's great French drama, Taibhdhearc na Gaillimhe has for treatment a piece which, while of the spectacular type, has much more to recommend it than the spectacular.

The play is a psychological study of vocations and treats with spiritual and human emotions in a manner which shows the touch of the master hand. Brilliantly constructed, it moves with power and dignity from the opening scene to the ring down of the curtain.

Taibhdhearc na Gaillimhe opened a five nights' run of the piece on Sunday night before a packed house. Amongst those present were: President E. de Valera, Mr. S. T. O'Kelly, Vice-President of the Executive Council; Tomás O'Conneor, and Mrs. H. Uí Choincheann, T.D.; Mr. Justice Meredith, Mr. Albert Power, R.E.A., and Miss May Power, Padraic O'Donnell, Dr. Kiernan, director of broadcasting for the Free State.

The Taibhdhearc company's treatment of the play was a masterpiece of reading and stagecraft, and reflects credit on the clever producer, Prionnsas Mac Diarmada. The principal figures of the drama moved and spoke their lines without any evidence of straining for effect. Even in the highly emotional pieces such as the temptation of Marguerite and Bernard and the effect of Bernard's disappearance on Marguerite, the characterisation was true and well balanced.

At the conclusion, President de Valera went to the back of the stage and complimented Prionnsas Mac Diarmada, the producer, and the members of his company on the brilliance of their performance.

The play will be repeated to-night (Tuesday) and on Wednesday and Thursday nights.

A full critique will appear in "The Connacht Tribune."

**100 MEETINGS.**

**By-election Campaign.**

In Galway on Sunday night were temporarily forgotten while all parties united in commemorating the memory of "Padraic O'Connell."

The fall in the by-election, however, did not apply to the same thing for all parties and in all cases the fall in the number of votes was not the same.

The campaign continues to be conducted in an ordinary manner, and the only election night was at Galway where the election for Education (Mr. T. Derrill)

**GALWAY'S TRIBUTE**

**MEMORIAL TO**

**CAELIC WRITER**

**President and O Conaire**

A remarkable tribute was paid to the memory of a great Irishman on Sunday night in the presence of a gathering of several thousand people. Eamon de Valera, President of the Executive Council of the Free State, unveiled a memorial statue of the late Bialinn Ó Conaire.

C. H. Macdonald, Vice-President of the Gaelic League, presided at the ceremony. Other speakers included: Mr. Albert Power, R.E.A.; Mr. S. T. O'Kelly, Vice-President of the Executive Council; Mr. Justice Meredith; Mr. Padraic O'Donnell, Director of Broadcasting; and Mr. E. de Valera.

The statue, which is a bronze replica of the original in the John Fitzgerald Kennedy Memorial Park, was unveiled by Eamon de Valera, President of the Executive Council of the Irish Free State.

Reading copy of review

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A full critique will appear in "The Connacht Tribune."

An account of the unveiling of the memorial to Pádraig Ó Conaire and the surrounding events are described in Macken's unpublished autobiography. His account gives us a local view on the arrangements surrounding the de Valera visit and also the opportunity it presented the Taibhdhearc manager to 'show-case' the theatre as Ireland's vibrant Irish language theatre. The account from *Cockle and Mustard*, pages 187 to 191, can be read in **Appendix 1.5** and gives an insight into Ó Conaire as viewed by some local Galway people, the preparations for the visit of the President, the selected play, a meeting with the sculptor, Albert Power, and the recruiting of the cast for the play which led directly to Macken meeting his future wife, Peggy Kenny.

The undisguised intention of Dermody and the Taibhdhearc Directors was to impress de Valera and his party with this special production and in doing so to establish their case for additional funding for the theatre.

The play chosen to make this impression on the distinguished visitor and his party was *Beatha Iogantach Bhearnáid Óig de Menthon* (*La Merveilleuse histoire do jeune Bernard de Menthon*) by Henri Ghéon (**Footnote 1.4 & 1.5**). Bateman describes the production as having a lavish set and costumes and that the performance 'made a statement about the new confidence of An Taibhdhearc' (2003, 15). De Valera attended the opening night on Sunday 9 June 1935. There was a full-house and the play ran for a further four performances.

**Footnote 1.4:** Henri Ghéon (March 15, 1875 - June 13, 1944[1]), born Henri Vangeon in Bray-sur-Seine, Seine-et-Marne, was a French playwright, critic and poet. Educated in Sens, he moved to Paris in 1893 to study medicine. He started to write poetry around the same time, along with his colleagues Francis Jammes and Mallarmé. He also published avant garde criticism. In 1887 he met André Gide who was his literary guide and friend for twenty years. He also wrote an article about the truth of Saint John. In 1909 he was a founding member of the Nouvelle Revue Française (NRF). Ghéon served as an army doctor in the First World War. During this period he regained his Catholic faith (as described in his work "L'homme né de la guerre", "The Man Born out of the War"). From then on much of his work portrays episodes from the lives of the saints. From: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henri>

**Footnote 1.5:** Saint Bernard of Menthon (Bernard of Montjoux), Born in 923, probably in the Château de Menthon near Annecy, in Savoy and died at Novara in 1008. He was descended from a rich, noble family and received a thorough education. Refusing an honourable marriage he fled to Italy and joined the Benedictine order. Bernard was ordained priest and on account of his learning and virtue was made Archdeacon of Aosta (966). For the convenience and protection of travellers St. Bernard founded a monastery and two hospices. In 1913 these hospices were renowned for the generous hospitality extended to all travellers over the Great and Little St. Bernard Passes, so called in honour of the founder of these charitable institutions. He was interred in the cloister of St. Lawrence. Although venerated from the 12th century in such places of northern Italy as Aosta, Novara and Brescia, he was not formally recognized as a saint until his canonization by Innocent XI in 1681. Pope Pius XI confirmed Bernard as patron saint of the Alps in 1923. From: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bernard\\_of\\_Menthon](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bernard_of_Menthon)

The outcome, partly arising from this visit by the President to Galway and to the Taibhdhearc, was an increase in the Taibhdhearc's government grant from £600 to £1,000 per annum. With this money it was decided to recruit a full time actor and the position was offered to Walter Macken. The rate for the job was £1-10-0 per week. (Footnote 1.6)

It was during the rehearsals and the performance of *The Marvellous Life of St. Bernard de Menthon* that Macken came into contact with Peggy Kenny for the first time.

Peggy Kenny in her *Cursai* conversation with her son Ultan Macken in 1988 was asked about her meeting with Walter Macken and explained the circumstances in the following extracts.

The questions are underlined and the interviewer was her son, Ultan Macken.

#### Picture 1.8 (a)

Was your father involved in the 'Taibhdhearc'?

No. He was interested and went to see the plays and went to see your father in them but he didn't know who he was looking at at the time. My father had a great 'gra' for the Irish. He was a great Nationalist in his own way. Liam O Brian was the director of the 'Taibhdhearc' in those days and he came to my father and asked him about me. I used to act in school plays. My father came in one day and said that he wanted me to go into the 'Taibhdhearc'. I used to act in school plays. The play in the 'Taibhdhearc' was for some President or something, anyway it was very important. But I was young and I played Badminton and Tennis so I just said 'I won't have time for rehearsals'. But he would just say 'you're far too particular, of course you'll have time'. Anyway with all the arguments, I always did what I was told in the end so I went along. I went very reluctantly - wasn't it the Grace of God that I did. Your father was playing the lead 'Beatha iontach Bernard Óg de Maintain'. I don't know who translated it. That was about 1935.

[Author's note: The father in the question is Tom Cork Kenny, Peggy's father]

#### Picture 1.8 (b)

Can you remember did you meet Daddy in the first rehearsal?

Yes, at the first reading rehearsal. Mary Gilmartin took the other leading part, she was a lovely woman from Galway who is living in the States now. Your father went into the 'Taibhdhearc' because he used to be in St. Joseph's school plays - he played Iosagan' once. And, of course, his father also went there.

Footnote 1.6: Bateman states that the original request was to raise the government grant to £2400 but this was considered to be too much. In February 1936 the grant was increased to £1000 with a one-off payment of £200 for maintenance of the building (2003, 14). The Deóntas Nua was reported in the *Connacht Tribune*, 4 April 1936, p 6.



### Picture 1.8 (c)

Was he employed there then?

Yes, he was, at less than 30s/week so he had to do jobs on the side. His mother knew people in the County Council and he used to do extra work there - bookkeeping and things. His mother had very little money. So we met and became very friendly and got on very well probably because we were both readers and we liked the same writers. We liked literature but we talked about everything

Tom Kenny collection, transcript (tape 3)

There appears to be no extant programme for *The Marvellous Life of St. Bernard de Menthon*, so it is necessary to refer to the review in the *Connacht Tribune* <sup>41</sup> for confirmation of some of the cast members as well as for comment on the play's reception and the performances.

The review runs to just over 21 column inches and is placed beside a large photograph of Eamon de Valera with a big crowd of mainly young people around him, facing the Ó Conaire statue. The legend under the photograph reads:

For all time this living image in stone by Mr. Albert Power will tell residents and visitors to Galway of the greatest of Irish writers, Padraig O Conaire....

The review includes a photograph of Prionnsiaí Mac Diarmadha within the text.

Over a headline identical to the one from the *Connacht Sentinel* (Picture 1.7) it reads (excerpts):

It is not unusual to see dramatic productions commanding a certain amount of success solely on the strength of the spectacular in their composition. In *The Marvellous Life of St. Bernard de Menthon*, Professor Liam O'Briain's adaptation into Irish of Henri Gheon's great French drama, *Taibhdhearc na Gaillimhe*, has for treatment a piece which, while of the spectacular type, has much more to recommend it than the spectacular.

The play is a psychological study of vocations and treats with spiritual and human emotions in a manner which shows the touch of the master hand. Brilliantly constructed, it moves with power and dignity from the opening scene to the ring down of the curtain....

The Taibhdhearc company's treatment of the play was a masterpiece of reading and stagecraft, and reflects credit on the clever producer, Prionnsiais Mac Diarmadha. The principal figures of the drama moved and spoke their lines without any evidence of straining for effect....

Prof. O'Briain has given a great play to the Irish stage, and Prionnsiais Mac Diarmadha has made it the medium for showing that a very high standard of dramatic art exists in the western capital....

Despite handicaps [stage size], Mr. Mac Diarmadha's guiding genius evolved a splendid triple stage system necessary for this production. The settings and costumes were also very good....

The central figure of the drama, St Bernard, was played by Bhaitear Maicin. Mr. Macken showed admirable restraint in St. Bernard's mental battles against worldly ties – a restraint which held him from overstepping the bounds into rant. He maintained a good balance all through....

The scenes in which the devils, servants and monks appeared were also excellent and the whole production a splendid tribute to the playwright, producer and artistes.

A cast of 16 is named in the *Connacht Tribune* report and this includes Prionnsiais Mac Diarmadha playing the Jester, Peig Ni Choinnigh as Bheantiarna Miolans and Deasmhuin O Coinnigh ( Peig's brother) as an Ridire Duyngt.

[Author's note: The microfilm copy of this edition of the *Connacht Tribune* is extremely poor and reproduction of a sensible reading copy of the review was not possible.]

Walter Macken and Peggy Kenny's (Peigi Ní Choinnig) appeared together in *Na Gaduithe* le Gearóid Ó Lochlainn in December 1935. A successful production played before modest audiences. Macken's performance was commented on by *The Connacht Tribune* <sup>42</sup>

... a very good performance as Brian, the young man who was able to move around and enjoy himself while conducting his investigations into the robbery. His scenes with Eibhlin were good but we were inclined to wonder what passed through his mind when, in the garden scene, he told Eibhlin, [played by Eibhlin Ni Shuilleabhain] of his love and was accepted. His smile did not seem to be one of happy contentment. However, he was free and natural in speech and gesture all through.

Walter and Peggy played together in most of the Taibhdhearc productions during 1936 and into 1937, such as, *Tristan agus Isolde* by Joseph Bedier and Louis Artus, (February 1936), *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* by Molière, (May), *Diarmuid agus Grainne* le Mícheál Mac Liammoir, (November), *An Diabhail I nAlcaraz* le Máirtín Ó Caidhín (November).

Picture 1.9: The cast from *Diarmuid agus Grainne* le Mícheál Mac Liammoir, (8-11 October 1936. Macken is also listed for his contribution to the setting).<sup>43</sup>

## DIARMUID AGUS GRAINNE

le MÍCHEÁL MAC LIAMMOIR

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**AN FHIRIÓGÁN:**

DIA-MUI	PWEINNIAR Ó CILLÍN.
PIERR MAC CURRIGILL	UINSIONN Ó MATÓNA.
CLARENCE Ó DUBLIN	BAICÉAN Ó MAIGÍN.
DIARMUID	MÍCHEÁL Ó DUBHIN.
GRAINNE	PÁDRAIG Ó FIONNLACÓ.
STILL	TOMÁS Ó NÉALUIGÉ.
ONCAS	ENIOGÓIR TÚMLÓIS.
DIARMUID, DEAR	MÁIRÍN Ó DINEÁIN.
GRÁ, TEAR DE LA FOMORIAN	TOMÁS Ó NÉALUIGÉ.
LEAR	SEÁN Ó CINNÉIDE.
ONCAS	SEAMUS MAC AN AILLA.
DIARMUID	SEAN Ó DUBLIN.
AN DIARMUID	PAIS NÍ COINNÉ.
GRAINNE	MÁIRÍN NÍ GILLIA MÍÁIN.
SEÁN	EIBHLÍN NÍ SHUILLEABHAIN.
DIARMUID	SÍGÉ NÍ FIONNLACÓ.
SEAN DIARMUID	NUALA NÍ DUBHIN.
AN CAS, DIA AN FÉID	EIGNEACÁN, MAC AN DUBHIN.
AN CAS DUINE SÍGÉ	EIBHLÍN NÍ DUBHIN.
AN CAS DUINE SÍGÉ	ÁINE NÍ DUBHIN.
AN CAS DUINE SÍGÉ	NUALA NÍ SHUILLEABHAIN.

AN FHIRIÓGÁN, DO LÉIRIÚ AN DRÁMA A CÉAD AN  
FIRIÓGÁN SCÉISE AGUS NA CULCADA.

**AG LÉIRIÚ LEIS É:**

FIRIÓGÁN SCÉISE	BAICÉAN Ó MAIGÍN AGUS TOMÁS MAC AN FÉID.
CULCADA	MÁIRÍN NÍ GILLIA MÍÁIN MÁIRÍN NÍ GILLIA CÉALLAIS.
SHILLIA	TOMÁS MAC AN FÉID.
ONCAS	INGEACÁN NÍ DUBHIN.
DIARMUID AGUS GRAINNE	DIARMUID Ó COINNÉ.

**THE PURSUIT OF DIARMUID AND GRAINNE**

This is the most famous of the stories of Fionn and his Fianna which we have. Grainne, daughter of Cormac Mac Airt, High King of Ireland, was espoused to Fionn, but on the night of the wedding feast, she gave a sleeping potion to Fionn and his men—to all, except Diarmuid O Duibhne, Fionn's closest friend. Thus she loved, for her eyes had seen the love-star which he wore on his forehead. She put geasa or spiritual obligations which he was bound to obey, on Diarmuid, who against his will and protesting his loyalty to Fionn leaves Tara with her.

Fionn pursued them throughout Ireland. He had Diarmuid in a hut in the midst of a wood, but Grainne had already escaped. Aonghus, the god of love, Diarmuid's foster-father and guardian, had come to warn them and had taken away Grainne to safety. Fionn enters in fury intent on killing Diarmuid. But Diarmuid's assurances to him that he had not betrayed his fidelity to him, the effects of his life-long friendship and affection for Diarmuid stay Fionn's hand and he lets Diarmuid go. But scarcely had Diarmuid departed when Fionn regrets his generous impulse and orders his arrest and death. Diarmuid, however, has escaped "rising like a flame on the staff of his spear," through the intervention of Aonghus.

In a cave by the sea in Leinster, Diarmuid finds Grainne again, watched over by the god. It is a night of storm and magic and suddenly a weird figure enters. It is Clach, one of the mysterious race of the Fomorians who inhabited the islands of the north. He plays a chess game with Diarmuid for Grainne. He wins the game but Diarmuid slays him. Fionn's treachery and Grainne's persistent wooing of him prevail over his resolve to restrain the growing love for her that he felt in his heart.

Years later, at their home in Rath Grainne in North Connacht, Fionn has made friends with them again, and with his men is visiting them. But Fionn has not forgotten and is consumed by a desire for vengeance and his passion for Grainne. It is the last night of the year, when the "magic wild boar of Ben Bulbin" is abroad, which no man can resist. Fionn entices Diarmuid out to hunt the boar. Grainne sees the fight with second sight, from the Rath. Diarmuid is brought in dying. Fionn alone has the magic gift of curing him if he will give him a drink of water from his two hands. A momentary struggle between his highest impulses and his long-nursed vengeance takes place in Fionn's heart, but this time evil prevails over good. Diarmuid dies and Grainne is at last in Fionn's power. But it is an empty triumph. It is not the same Grainne. Her heart remains with Diarmuid's dead body.



Macken's last plays' during this period at the Taibhdhearc was the double-header, *An Feilm le Seán Ó hÓgáin* and *Grádh na Spréidhe* (*Sovereign Love*) by T. C. Murray. Peggy Kenny played in *Sovereign Love* and both plays ran from 8-10 January 1937.

Picture 1.10

**"An Feilm."**

bun dráma le seán ó hógáin

fuireann:

Tadg Ó Fatbais	— — — —	Uisceán Ó Maicín
Dean Eabóis	— — — —	Sigle Míe Fionntaoid.
Seán, mac leo	— — — —	Micéad Ó Deign.
Tadg, mac eile leo	— — — —	Tadg Ó Súilleabháin
Eamonn Concannon	— — — —	Criopóir Cúntaig
Dean Eamonn	— — — —	Máire Míe S' Máirín
Riocard Ó Ceapraic	— — — —	Uiníonán Ó Macóna.
Seamus Ruab	— — — —	Seamus Mac Dubáin.
Paolín Saba	— — — —	Páopais Ó Cinnéide.
Máire, cailín d'impire	— — — —	Eiblin Mí Súilleabháin.

RODARCANNA:

Páipéir Tadg Ó Fatbais, agus feompas i dtús Eamonn Ó Concannon éasáirim 'i leic-céad bliain ó foit.

**"Grádh na Spréidhe."**

le c c ó MUIRÍÓCE

districte as máirín ó DIREÁIN.

fuireann:

Dáirín Ó Ceapraic	— — — —	Uisceán Ó Maicín.
Eabún }		Peig Mí Connig.
Cáic }	á Clann Ingean	Eiblin Mí Súilleabháin.
Máirín Ó Dáirín, a n-éacail	— — — —	Criopóir Cúntaig.
Dean Mí Iomána	— — — —	Sigle Míe Fionntaoid.
Cáic Ó Dáirín	— — — —	Uiníonán Ó Macóna.
Dáirín, a mac	— — — —	Micéad Ó Deign.
Tomár Ó Dáirín	— — — —	Seamus Mac Dubáin.
Dáirín, a n-éacail	— — — —	Páopais Ó Cinnéide.

RODARC:

Páipéir an Shánuille fón i dtús na h-uaisle.

**Synopsis "AN FEILM."**

*An Feilm* is a story of the Land War. The first scene is laid in the house of Tadg Ó Fatbais, a well-to-do farmer. Mrs. Concannon, wife of Eamonn Concannon who was in love with Mrs. Fahy before a match was arranged for her with Tadg, enters with the sad story that she and her family are to be evicted, unless she gets £50 to pay the rent. Mrs. Fahy is unable to give her this amount of money.

In the second scene we discover that the Concannon farm has been purchased by Tadg Ó Fatbais. His wife appeals to him to give it up, but he refuses to do so. She then tells him that Richard O'Carroll, a brother-in-law of Eamonn Concannon, and an old enemy of Tadg's, has returned from America; and in the third scene we find Richard availing of the situation to avenge an old wrong. The play ends in tragedy.

T. C. Murray's *Sovereign Love* deals with match-making in a series of amusing situations which sufficiently explain the plot.



The *Connacht Tribune* in the City Edition reported on *An Feilm* agus *Grádh na Spréidhe* on the 16 January 1937. This was more as a news item as the run of the two plays ended on the 10 January. It was a long and detailed report and the relevant extracts are:

.... The delightful treatment of the Irish version (by Máirtín Ó Direáin, Galway) [*Sovereign Love*] given by the Galway Irish Theatre (Taibhdhearc na Gaillimhe) during the week-end provided very pleasant entertainment for appreciative, if small audiences....

*Grádh na Spréidhe*, (*Sovereign Love*) is a peasant match-making entanglement story of a class very popular among the dramatists who compose the Irish Playwrights Association. It is a pity that so few Irish dramatists break away from the type of plot on which these plays are built, and seek material in other aspects of Irish life. As the play stands, however, it is in itself a clever piece of work.

Uaitear O Maicin carried the honours of the Taibhdhearc production. This young actor who has innumerable successes to his name, gave a delightful reading of Domhnall O Cearnaigh, the old farmer who seeks to secure a good “fortune” with his prospective marrying in son-in-law....

The role of Eibhlin, the girl around whom the story pivoted and the other sister, Cait, were capably treated by Peig Ni Choinnig and Eibhlin Ni Shuilleabhain....

The other play, *An Feilm*, is a story of peasant life but of an entirely different type.... Uaitear O Maicin and Sighle Nic Fionnlaoich, in the respective roles of Tadhg O Fathaigh and his wife, also got their pieces over well....

Proinnsias Mac Diarmada, the producer, was responsible for the general production work and the very effective lighting and stage effects. He was assisted by Uaitear O Maicin and Tomas Mac an Ríogh.

No doubt to the surprise and shock of their families, the Galway public and the Taibhdhearc management, Walter Macken and Peggy Kenny eloped to Dublin where they were married on the 9 February 1937. From there they moved to London (Ultan Macken, 2004, 123).

From another part of her conversation for the RTE *Cursai* programme Peggy Macken remembered the wedding day.

**Picture 1.11 (See also Footnote 1.7)**

I think it was Wednesday, but I'm not sure. In Fairview after the wedding we stayed in the same hotel that we stayed in the night before. We stayed in Amien St. because it was easier to get a connection for the boat. Larry picked us up that morning and Mrs. DeLacy who didn't know what was happening was so angry at Larry for not telling her we were getting married. Larry was so nice he even gathered violets for me on his way because he knew that I liked flowers. We were in church on time for the wedding but there was another couple getting married before us in the same church. This gave Walter time to think and when he came to the altar he turned to me and said 'You know Peggy this is a very serious thing'. I just laughed and I thought typical Macken! We had breakfast in the hotel afterwards.

Tom Kenny collection

Macken's 'apprenticeship' at the Taibhdhearc under Dermody must have contributed greatly to his development as an actor. His industry as a stage hand, as a feisteas stáitse, initially supporting Tomás Mac an Ríogh, the permanent stage hand, must have established for him a positive reputation with the Taibhdhearc manager, the Board and also with the Taibhdhearc audiences.

This view is completely supported by the reference Frank Dermody provided to Macken<sup>44</sup> when informed that he was leaving the theatre. Written on behalf of the Directors of Taibhdhearc na Gaillimhe, it confirms the high regard in which Macken was held there. Dermody's praise for Macken's acting abilities appears to be without reservation.

**Picture 1.12 (extract from page 1 of Dermody's reference for Walter Macken)**

Mr. Macken is in my opinion the most outstanding character actor (comedy and tragedy) in Ireland to-day not excluding the Abbey Theatre. My contention may be substantiated by a perusal of many press notices which he has received. As regards his personal character I have always found him to be honest upright and trustworthy in every respect.

**Footnote 1.7:** The wedding day, the 9 February 1937, was a Tuesday.

Perhaps this error occurred because Walter Macken incorporated many of the events and incidents that occurred in his life into his plays, novels and short stories. In his novelette *God Made Sunday*, published with other short stories by Macmillan as *God Made Sunday and Other Stories* in 1951, the chapter on Colmain and Catriona courtship ends:

".... I could smell the honey of her nearness, my life was filled, for I was no longer alone, and that's what I want to say, we were married on a Wednesday."<sup>45</sup>

Macken's leaving of the Taibhdhearc is described as 'an irreparable loss to this theatre' by Dermody. The complete reference, dated the 8 February 1937, is reproduced in **Appendix 1.6**

The frame of mind of Walter and Peggy Macken when leaving Ireland is captured in the final paragraphs of *Cockle and Mustard*.

He concluded his autobiography with this longing for Galway.

.... Now we were at sea and nobody knew where we would end up.

The sea was choppy outside.

The low hills looked very green and the window panes sparkled in the sun. You would have to sneer at the sight or you would begin to feel sentimental. It was the first time I had ever left our country. There, already you were beginning to separate it from where you were going.

It was cold.

I pulled the collar of my coat up around my neck.

"There is one thing," I said, "that I still haven't solved."

"What's that?" Peggy asked. Her mind was far away. Her mind was at home going into the office, starting off the day, hearing the linotype machines begin to clatter, wondering how her father would react to the letter she had written to him which must be in his hands now.

I saw all the kids in St. Joseph's Avenue, playing pitch and toss, walking on the warm pavements in bare feet in the summertime, going for picnics in Barna woods, swimming out in the Counsellors, rapping at door knockers and running away, teasing the countrymen at the market in the Small Crane, stealing sticks from them, raiding orchards, serving Mass like little angels, fishing for mackerel from the sides of old boats in the docks, fighting bare fist fights around the jail after school, playing pontoon, building smelly canvas camps in the damp places. That, and the time I had wondered about it.

"I still don't know," I said "whether I am cockle or mustard.

(Page 227)

He was not to know that this longing coupled with fear of the impending war, coinciding with an upheaval within the Board at Taibhdhearc na Gaillimhe, was to provide the Macken family with the opportunity to return to Galway.

In November 1938, just under two years after Macken's departure, Frank Dermody moved from the Taibhdhearc to the Abbey Theatre in Dublin (Welch, 1999, 158, Hunt 1979, 161). It is this, perhaps not unexpected move, that provided the opportunity for Walter Macken to return to Taibhdhearc na Gaillimhe as Dermody's natural successor.

## References:

- <sup>32</sup>. BUW, Folder 46: *Cockle and Mustard*, pages 111-115
- <sup>33</sup>. *The Connacht Tribune*, 15 July 1933, page 5
- <sup>34(a) (b)</sup>. Bateman, Fiona, Kieran Hoare, Lionel Pilkington. *Taibhdhearc na Gaillimhe, 1928–2003*. Galway: James Hardiman Library, NUIG, 2003
- <sup>35</sup>. Pine, Richard with Richard Cave. *The Dublin Gate Theatre 1928-1978*. Cambridge: Chadwyck-Healey Ltd., 1984, page 34
- <sup>36</sup>. Blythe Papers, UCD Archives: (a) P24/ 430/ 92; (b) P24/ 430/ 93; (c) P24/ 430/ 28
- <sup>37</sup>. ÓConaola, Micheál. *The Influence of Nationalism and the Irish Language on the Abbey Theatre*. MA thesis, St Patrick's College, Drumcondra, Dublin 9, 2007
- <sup>38</sup>. *The Connacht Tribune*, 16 December 1933.
- <sup>39</sup>. *The Connacht Tribune*, 17 March 1934, page 4
- <sup>40</sup>. *The Connacht Sentinel*, 11 June 1935, page 3.
- <sup>41</sup>. *The Connacht Tribune*, 15 June 1935, page 7.
- <sup>42</sup>. *The Connacht Tribune*, 14 December 1935.
- <sup>43</sup>. BUW, Folder 15.
- <sup>44</sup>. The original copy of Dermody's reference is in BUW, Folder 15
- <sup>45</sup>. Macken, Walter. *God made Sunday and Other Stories*. Dingle, Co. Kerry: Brandon Book Publishers Ltd., 1996

## Chapter 2

### The return to Taibhdhearc na Gaillimhe

Early in 1939 the Taibhdhearc Board approached Macken asking if he would consider returning to Galway as manager/ play director of Taibhdhearc na Gaillimhe (Bateman, 2003, 18 and Stafford, 2001, 22). Stafford <sup>46</sup> mentions the salary as £3 per week. The offer was accepted.

The family returned to live in Galway in 1939.

Peggy Macken in her *Cursai* interview describes their return to Galway.

#### Picture 2.1

We always wanted to go home because your father was an Irish writer and you often heard him saying that a writer should remain in his own country. He wasn't that happy really. His few friends would get hysterical if they knew that Walter was selling insurance. They loved him but couldn't follow his brogue.

How did you get home then?

The producer was leaving the 'Taibhdhearc' and I think it was Liam O'Brien that got in touch with us to tell us about this. I'm not sure whether it was Liam or not. Then there I was left in London and us struggling along while your father took the boat over to talk to them. They gave him the job at £3.15d so back we came then. We came back in September '39 I remember the weather was lovely. We stayed with the eldest daughter then. They had a lovely house I don't

Tom Kenny collection

The events leading up to the Macken return must have raised some discussion among the members of the Taibhdhearc Board. Dermody's leaving should have been anticipated. He was at the time also a visiting director at the Abbey Theatre in Dublin. Macken was only 24 years old and however talented he was thought to be, his only theatre experience had been at the Taibhdhearc as a school boy and immediately afterwards. Any uncertainty among the Board members must have been compounded by Macken's sudden departure in 1937, eloping as he did with the eldest daughter of a prominent and, indeed, powerful local businessman. Only speculation remains on what may have been said and agreed.

When cataloguing the Taibhdhearc Board minutes the NUIG archivist found that the minutes from mid-1932 up to the 8 April 1939 were missing. During this period there was much dissension among members of the Taibhdhearc Board. This is briefly referred to by Bateman, (2003, 13).



Throughout this period the Taibhdhearc programme continued under the day-to day control of Frank Dermody. It is clear that at the establishment of the Taibhdhearc the Board were interested to have a national figure such as MacLiammóir in charge and they were less happy with a soldier, Dermody, (see Footnote 1.1). Allowing for such local politics on this matter, some Board members may have been satisfied to see Dermody leave but where they stood on Macken's appointment will never be known.

What we do know is that *The Connacht Tribune* on the 25 March 1939, page 7, reported the resignation of Board members Seamus de Bhilmot and Professor Liam Ó Briain. They were replaced by Dr. Thomas Walsh, a local medical doctor and Mr. L. E. O'Dea, a local solicitor. Towards the end of this *Connacht Tribune* report the next Taibhdhearc production was mentioned as *Children of the Moon* by Martin Flavin and the report concluded with the following opinion on the play

This is one of the most difficult from the point of view of the actor yet attempted by the company. Galway audiences will, however, shortly have the pleasure of seeing some of their old favourites rising manfully to their task of delicate interpretation.

Walter Macken's return to the Taibhdhearc stage was announced two weeks later in *The Connacht Tribune* on the 8 April 1939. It reported the following, with some enthusiasm, on page 3: **Picture 2.2**

**"CHILDREN OF THE  
MOON."**

**Drama In Galway.**

Patrons of Taibhdhearc na Gaillimhe (Galway Irish Theatre) will be pleased to learn that Walter Macken, one of the most versatile and talented artistes ever to appear on the stage of this theatre, will fill the leading male role in the forthcoming production of Martin Flavin's drama, "Children of the Moon."

The drama is one which established the reputation of the playwright as one of the leading dramatists in America and the translation by Leon O'Hara contains all that won praise in the original English version. It is a piece that needs delicate interpretation and in the Taibhdhearc production it is assured of this in the leading roles.

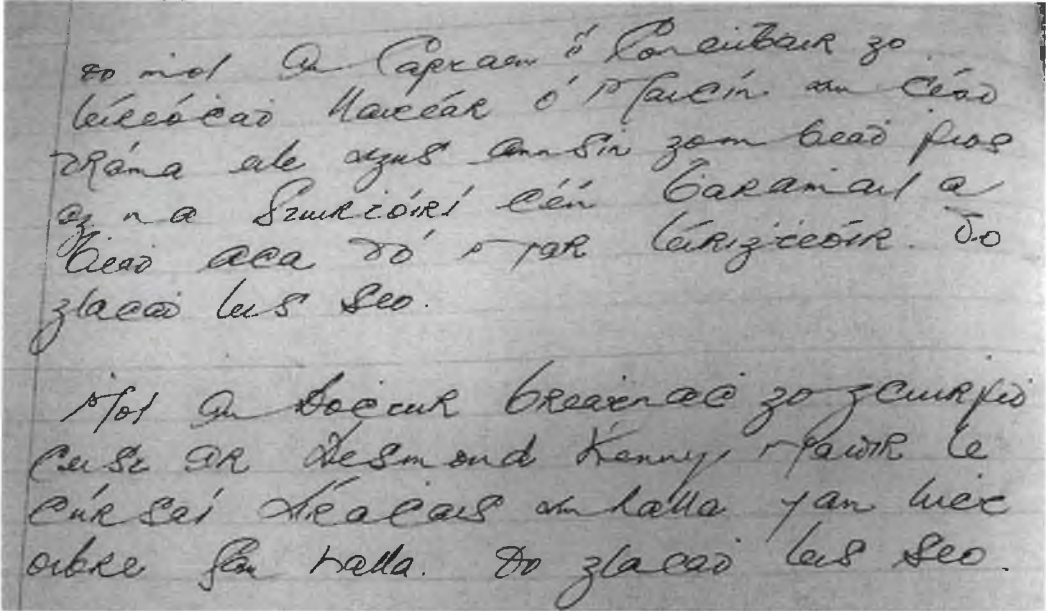
Playing opposite Mr. Macken in the leading feminine role will be Miss M. Kilmartin, a lady who shares with Mr. Macken the distinction of bringing his ironic talent on the Taibhdhearc stage to a standard seldom if ever surpassed on the English professional stage. The production will be on April 20, 21, 22 and 23.

8/4/39 *Connacht Tribune* p3.

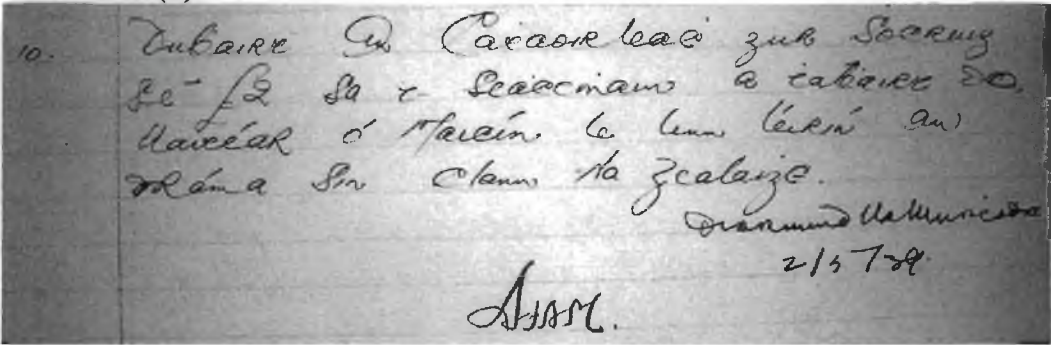
The Taibhdhearc Board appeared to reserve their position on the role for Macken as a director/producer (léirigtheoir) in the theatre. The minutes for meeting of the 8 April 1939 record this, **Picture 2.3(a)**.

Item 10 of the minutes of the same meeting, **Picture 2.3(b)**, records a payment to Macken during the production of *Clann na Gealaigh*.

**Picture 2.3(a)**



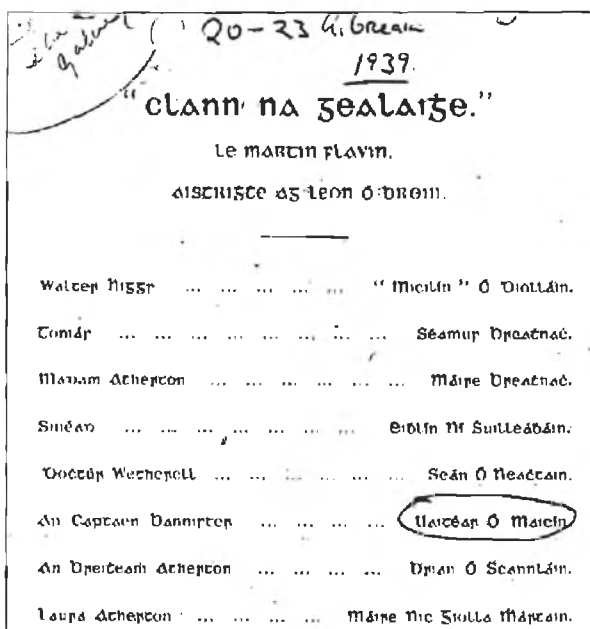
**Picture 2.3(b)**



Walter Macken played Captain Bannister in *Clann na Gealaighe* (*Children of the Moon*) which ran from the 20-23 April 1939.



**Picture 2.4:** Cast from the play programme for *Clann na Gealaighe*:



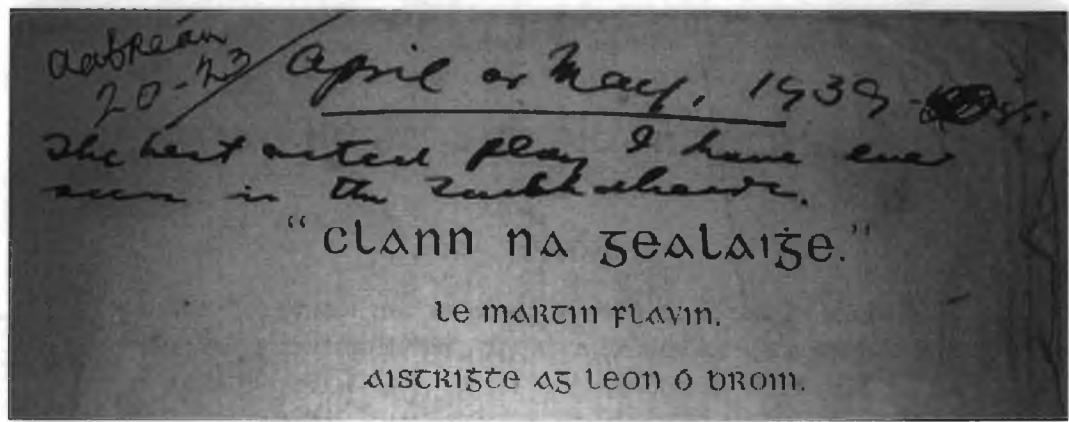
Unfortunately, and in contrast with the 'advanced' publicity for the play in *The Connacht Tribune* on the 22 April, page 12, and in *The Connacht Sentinel* on the 18 April, page 3, neither paper carries a review or report on the performances or on Macken's return to the Taibhdhearc stage.

*The Connacht Tribune* in its copy, dated 29 April 1939, page 7, prints a photograph from the play showing Máire Breathnach, Eibhlín Ní Suilleabháin, Seán Ó Neachtain, and Bhaitear (Uaitéar) Ó Maicin.

A play programme in the **Tom Kenny Collection** belonging to an unknown audience member records a personal observation in a scribbled comment across the top of the programme's cast page:

**'The best acted play I have ever seen in the Taibhdhearc**

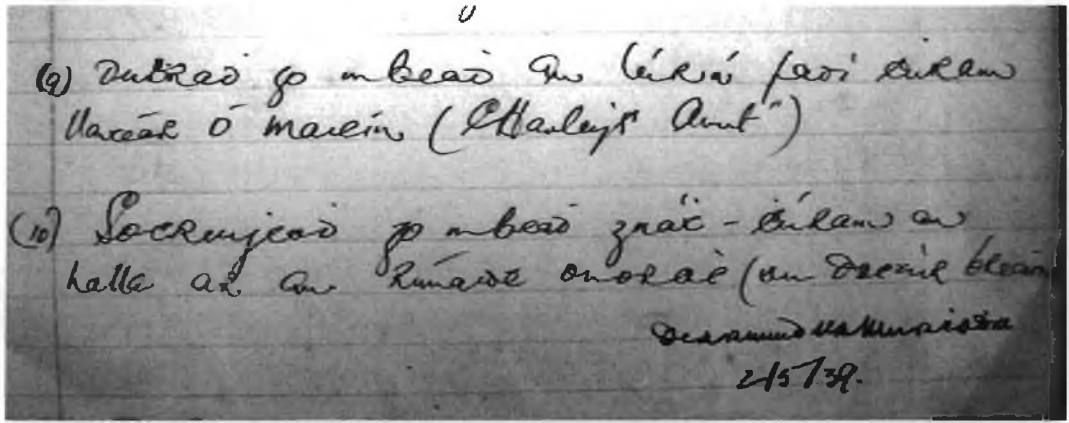
Picture 2.5



By the end of April the Taibhdhearc Board appears to have resolved some of the concerns they may have had about Macken’s role in the theatre. Item 9 of the Board Minutes of their meeting on the 28 April 1939 records their decision to have Walter Macken produce/ direct the June play, *Charley’s Aunt* by Brandon Thomas.

Item 10 of the same minutes gave responsibility for the theatre to ‘an Doctúr Breathnach’, (Dr. Walsh).

Picture 2.6



The Taibhdhearc decision to produce *Charley’s Aunt* was first mentioned in *The Connacht Tribune* article ‘The Gaeltacht Comes to Galway’ on the 20 May and this referred to Macken’s role in the production as being: ‘... under the direction of Walter Macken.’

Prominent advertisements appeared in *The Connacht Tribune* on 27 May, page 12, and referred to the play as ‘the last production of the season’. This advertisement was repeated on 3 June, page 4, and 10 June, page 4.

**Picture 2.7:** Front page of the Programme for *Aintín Searlaí*



*The Connacht Tribune* on 17 June 1939 carried a report which could hardly be called a review but it did display an enthusiasm for the play. The report was on page 3 under the heading:

CHARLEY’S AUNT, GREET’S YOU.

Sparkling Comedy At Taibhdhearc Na Gaillimhe

Commenting on the cast, the reporter said it was ‘...chosen with care for their suitability and merit ...’ and went on to mention ‘... the leadership of Walter Macken’ and that this was ‘...his first programme’. See **Appendix 2.1** for the full report.

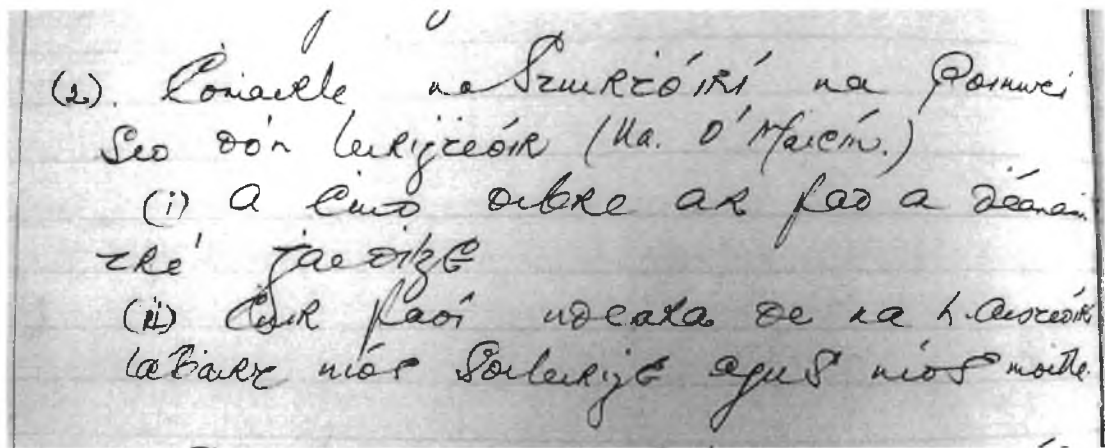
*The Connacht Tribune* printed a photograph from the play, across 3 columns, on 24 June 1939, page 5.

From all of this it would appear that Macken’s return and the attention given to his first production was newsworthy and was receiving positive support from the local press.

The minutes of the Taibhdhearc Board from this time also give us an insight into some of the views held by the Board of the Taibhdhearc and some of their decisions regarding the running of the theatre.

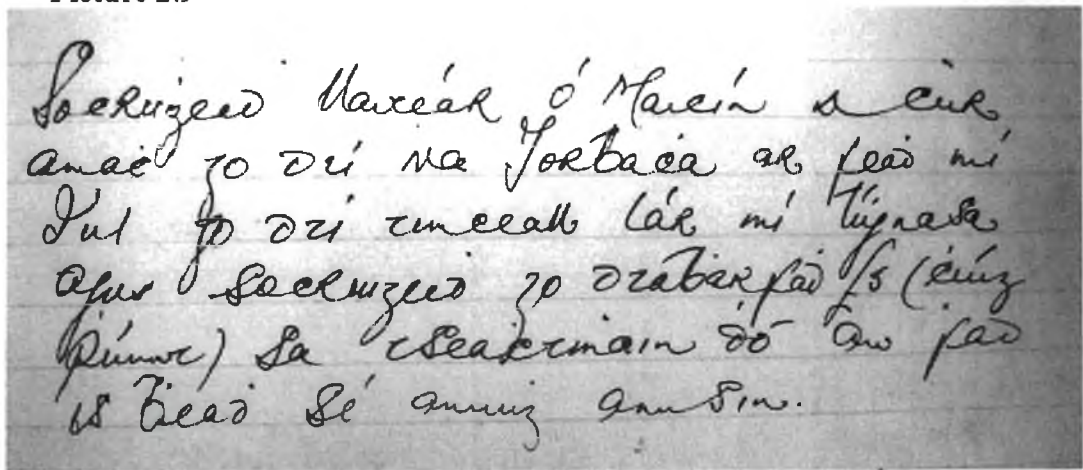
The minutes of the 6 June 1939 makes reference to the use of the Irish language by Macken and the Taibhdhearc actors. Clearly the Board members required that all the work be done through the medium of Irish and that they were also concerned about the actors' diction.

Picture 2.8



The concern by the Board members about Macken's own standard of Irish is addressed in item 2 of the Minutes of the 29 June meeting. The decision is that Macken is to go to the Gaeltacht for the month of July until mid-August 1939.

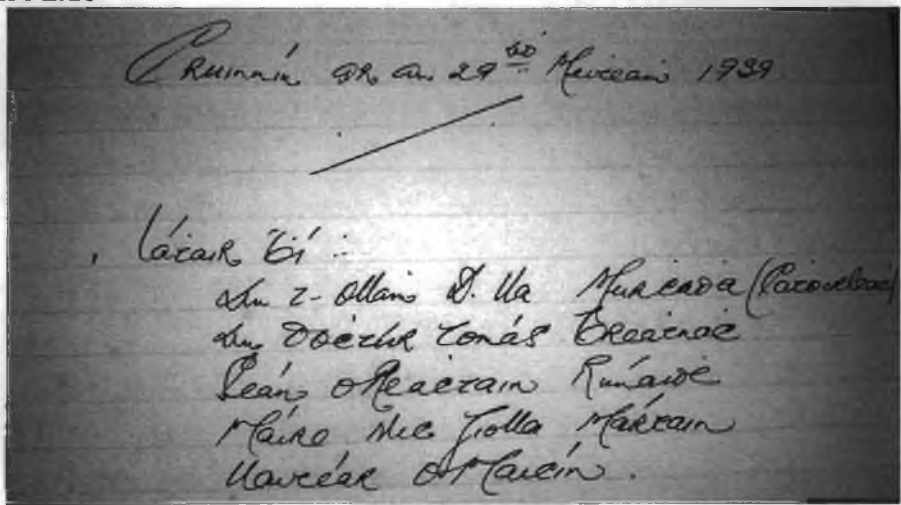
Picture 2.9



Walter Macken was not a native Irish-language speaker. He learned his Irish at school and there is great difficulty for a person with school Irish (however fluent they may be) to easily understand native speakers. Native Irish speakers do not have the same difficulty. For this reason using a common language such as English would have facilitated play preparation and direction. This use of Irish and English is mentioned later in this chapter by the former Taibhdhearc players.

The 29 June meeting of the Board appears to have been the first attended by Walter Macken. Walter Macken was never a member of the Board of Taibhdhearc na Gaillimhe. He attended Board meetings at the invitation of the chairman as the theatre manager to report on day-to-day progress at the theatre. It was the Board that also selected/ approved the play programme and clearly this was done in association with the manager who also functioned as the de facto artistic adviser.

Picture 2.10



Much of Macken’s work at the Taibhdhearc must by its range and nature overlap with his role as the theatre manager and this aspect of his career will be reviewed separately in this chapter.

At this point it should be sufficient to mention some of the plays in which he acted during this period. All were Irish-language plays or translations into Irish. Though all the plays were performed in Galway, there was one notable exception and on one other occasion Macken left Galway to perform in Belfast.

Macken took the Taibhdhearc Company to Dublin for a short season at the Gate Theatre in 1940. There they presented a total of 7 plays, 4 short and 3 full-length plays over 4 nights. He may have performed in all of the plays and reports in the national newspapers confirm that he contributed to the poetry reading on the opening night. The opening night, Oidhche an Uachtaráin, was a tribute to the then President of Ireland, Douglas Hyde. This special evening consisted of performances of three of Hyde's plays and readings of 12 of his poems. A full account of this event is covered in the next section.

His performances as an actor during this Dublin season were widely praised by the theatre critics for the national newspapers, confirmed by these sample extracts of the reviews.

(Footnote 2.1)

*The Irish Press* described the opening night, 10 November 1940, as

....a triumph, but most of all it was a personal triumph for Bhaitéar O Maicín, both as producer and actor.

*The Irish Times* commenting on the same performances wrote

.... In Bhaitéar O Maicín these Galway players, if last night's achievement is any test, have an actor of talent whom it is a pleasure to hear and see.

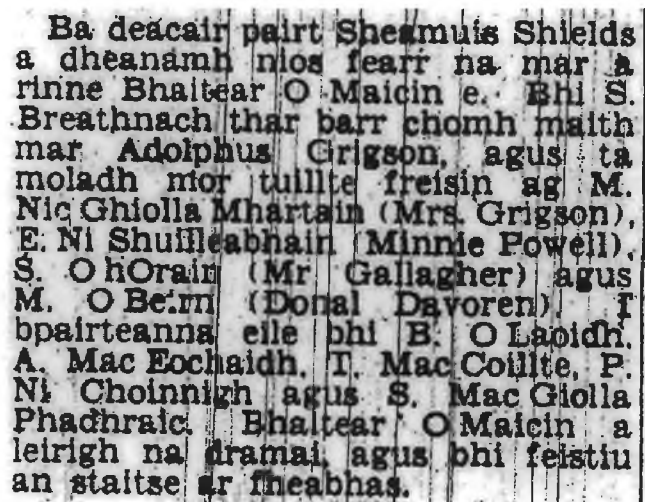
*The Irish Independent*, writing in Irish, told its readers

....agus bhí Bhaitéar Ó Maicín thar barr mar Raifteiri an beidhleadoir dall.

**Footnote 2.1:** The reports on Taibhdhearc na Gaillimhe season at the Gate Theatre, Dublin in 1940 can be found in *The Irish Press* on 11<sup>th</sup> November (page 7); 12<sup>th</sup>, page 6; 13<sup>th</sup>, page 6; 14<sup>th</sup>, page 7; in *The Irish Times* on the same dates on pages 8, 6, 6, 6, and in *The Irish Independent* on 11<sup>th</sup>, page 6; 12<sup>th</sup>, page 5, 13<sup>th</sup> page 6. Provincial papers also covered the event, for example *The Carlow Nationalist* on 16 November. *The Connacht Tribune* reported on 23 November 1940, page 5, on the Taibhdhearc's Dublin experience under the heading "Taibhdhearc's Triumph – in Dublin" and included an interview the producer, Walter Macken.

The two performances on 11 November were reported by all the papers and *The Irish Independent*, commenting on the performances in the Taibhdhearc's Irish language translation of O'Casey's *Shadow of a Gunman*, wrote:

Picture 2.11



Ba deacair páirt Sheamus Shields  
a dheanamh níos fearr ná mar a  
rinne Bhaitear Ó Maicín e. Bhi S.  
Breathnach thar barr chomh maith  
mar Adolphus Grigson, agus ta  
moladh mór tuillte freisin ag M.  
Ní Ghiolla Mhartain (Mrs. Grigson),  
E. Ní Shuilleabhain (Minnie Powell),  
S. Ó hOrain (Mr. Gallagher) agus  
M. Ó Beirn (Donal Davoren). I  
bpairteanna eile bhi B. O'Leary,  
A. Mac Eochaidh, T. Mac Coillte, P.  
Ní Chóinnigh agus S. Mac Giolla  
Phadhráic. Bhaitear Ó Maicín a  
leirigh na dramai agus bhi feistiu  
an staitse ar fheabhas.

*Journeys End* by R. C. Sheriff was performed on 12 November. On Macken's performance *The Irish Times* wrote:

Bhaitéir Ó Maicín's success as Captain Stanhope could scarcely have surprised the admirers he has already gained here.

*The Irish Press* commenting also on Macken's acting considered:

.... His acting last night brings the Gaelic theatre to the topmost rank of perfection ...

*The Irish Press* and *The Irish Times* reported on the final night of the Taibhdhearc's short Dublin season. The play performed was *The Man in the Cloak* by Louis Dalton. Both papers were complimentary. *The Irish Press* report was headed "Galway Players at their Best" while *The Irish Times* wrote:

Chief honours again went to Bhaitéir Ó Maicín's James Clarence Mangan,...



Examples of some of Walter Macken's other performances at Taibhdhearc na Gaillimhe during the 1940s' include:

Seamus Shields, *Scáil an Óglaigh* (*Shadow of a Gunman*), by Seán O Casey, 1940, 1941

Harry and Simon in *Mary Rose*, by J. M. Barrie, 1942

Savil Diocaoi in *An Stoirm* (*The Storm*) by Alexandre Ostrovski, 1944

Hector De La Mare in *Drámaidheacht in Inis* by Lennox Robinson, 1946.

**Picture 2.12**



Walter Macken with Míchéal Ó Beirn in *Shadow of a Gunman*, 1940

Tom Kenny Collection

Macken started writing at an early age (Macken, 2009, 83). In a biographical note he provided to Macmillan's in 1946 he mentions that he wrote his first play "at the age of 17" (2009, 168). We will learn later (Chapter 6) that he submitted some of his first plays to the Abbey Theatre and it is with his Irish-language plays that we see the first public signs of the emerging playwright.



He played in three of his Irish-language plays, *An Cailín Aimsire Abú* (*Salute the Servant*), 1943; *Oighreacht na Mara* (*Heritage of the Sea*), 1944; *An Fear ón Spidéal* (*The Man from Spidéal*), 1945. It is not known if he appeared in *Bhí Mac Agam Tráth* (1943), directed by him for Litheas Órga Chonradh na Gaeilge for one performance on 17 October 1943.

Walter Macken accepted an invitation from Carl Clopet Productions to play Captain Boyle in their production of Sean O'Casey's *Juno and the Paycock*, in 1943. The play was part of a 'three shows in one' presented by Mr. G. L. Birch at the Royal Hippodrome in Belfast.

Under the heading, 'FAMOUS STARS COMING, with *Juno*', *The Belfast Newsletter* announced the play on 12 April 1943. The article gave the opening date as the 3 May and made reference only to Mr. Birch, the performers, Diana Romney and Ronald Ibbs, the Carl Clopet Company. The article concluded with a paragraph on Sean O'Casey.

The show opened on 3 May 1943 and there were two performances each day at 2.30 p.m. and 7.00 p.m. The show ran for 6 days. *The Belfast Telegraph* carried an advertisement for the show on its front page from 3 to 6 May and on the top of page 2 for the final performances on 7 May. Also on 4 May in its 'Theatres and Cinemas' column the play is mentioned referring to the cast members as:

...Robert Ibbs, Diana Romney and well known Abbey players in the chief roles.

The same 'Theatres and Cinemas' column, on 7 May, mentions Noel Purcell as one of the performers in the play.

There is no report or review of the play or other mention of the show in *The Belfast Telegraph*. Perhaps this is due to World War II reports which filled many of the papers pages.

This modest coverage contrasts with that given to the play in *The Irish News and Belfast Morning News*. Their advertisement for the show on 3 May 1943, page 4, gave a full account of the entertainment.

Picture 2.13

**THREE SHOWS IN ONE FOR THE PRICE OF ONE**

**ROYAL HIPPODROME** MAY 3<sup>RD</sup> SIX DAYS ONLY

**"PLA-VAUDE-BAND"**

<p><b>SEAN O'CASEY'S</b> FAMOUS IRISH PLAY PRODUCED BY CARL CLOPET</p> <p><b>"JUNO and The PAYCOCK"</b> DIANA ROMNEY, RONALD BEEB, with the Clopet Company including many Abbey Players.</p>	<p><b>NINE BIG ACTS!!</b> PEGGY DELL BLACK &amp; RICHARDSON First Time Here THE DOYLE TWINS "URSULA &amp; NOEL" Merrell Bros. &amp; Angelina Annette, the Skipping Rope Wonder The Comerford Troupe of Irish Dancers THE MERRY MACS Ireland's Western Bros. Joseph M'LAUGHLIN In New Songs and Old Will Duffy, Gentleman Comedy Cyclist, with Pearl</p>	<p><b>MUSIC for ALL</b> by PEGGY DELL &amp; HER BAND First Time in Northern Ireland</p> <p>Featuring Eddie Lanchet, Bobby Lawless, Andy Lewis, Barry, Mobin, Jack Butler, Willie Davis, Alec McGuinness, Eamon Murphy, John O'Keefe, Sidney Shel- land, Solly Flood, Sid Custer</p>
--	---	---

★ **BOOK NOW** at 12 QT. VICTORIA STREET  
HOURS: 10 to 1-0—2-0 to 8-0 ★  
Phone: 28871 and 28872

This advertisement was carried from 3 May until the 7 May.

The paper did provide a report on the play on 4 May 1943, page 3, under the heading:

*Juno and the Paycock at the Hippodrome*

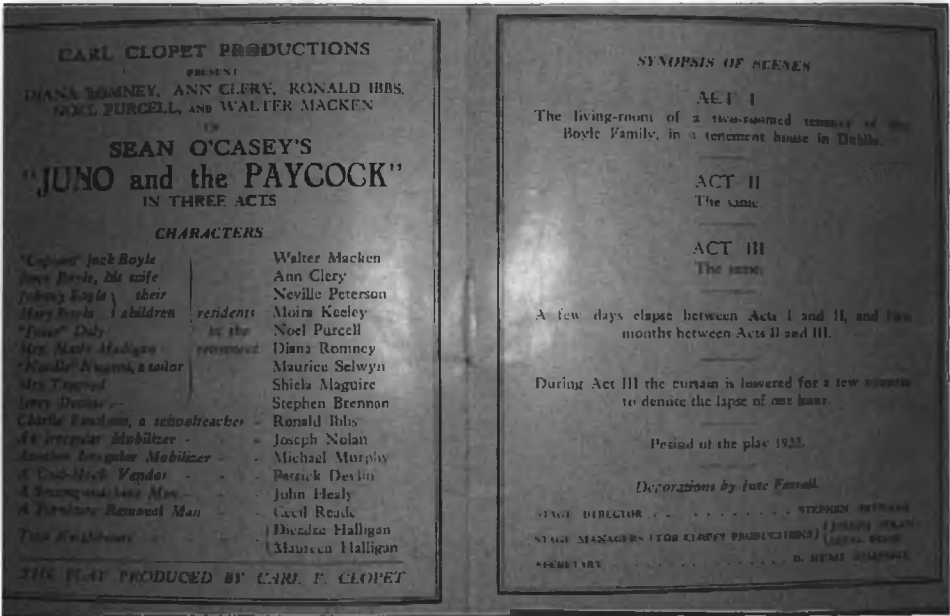
Referring to the cast, it reported that:

The players, who came from each of the four Provinces, several being from Abbey Theatre, succeeded in getting across the deep poignancy, bitter gloom, turmoil, delicate vein of comedy and frustration of O'Casey's greatest tragedy.

Noel Purcell, the well-known Dublin character actor and comedian, gave a masterful performance, playing the 'chancer'. Walter Macken's 'Captain Boyle' was also a good piece of comic acting.

The full report from *The Irish News and Belfast Morning News* is in **Appendix 2.2**.

Picture 2.14 shows the cast page from the programme <sup>47</sup> while the full 8 page programme is reproduced in Appendix 2.3.



Walter Macken continued to perform at the Taibhdhearc until his departure in January 1948.

During this period with the theatre we know that he did not perform in the following three productions.

- Aintín Searlaí, 15-18 May 1939
- Aicsean San Ósta le Tomás Ó Máille, 22-25 March 1945
- Na Fearachoin le Gearóid Ó Lochlainn, 6-9 February 1947

His final performance at the Taibhdhearc was as Aubrey Allington in *Dalladh Airgid* (*Tons of Money*) by Will Evans and Valentine in January 1948 which he also translated and directed.

The review on his final performance appeared in the Connacht Tribune on the 3 January 1948, page 5. Picture 2.15 shows the opening paragraphs and the full review is reproduced in Appendix 2.4.

Picture 2.15

## Riot of Fun at Taibhdhearc

There are quite a number of people in Galway who in their last glimpse of Mr. Walter Macken before his departure next week for Dublin will see him armed with a heavy axe making a fierce dash at a number of frightened people. These who have already seen him thus are those who attended the riot of fun that he presented at Taibhdhearc, on Thursday night, the first of a four nights' run of his own translation to Irish of the rollicking comedy, 'Tons of Money' by Will Evans and Valentine.

Mr. Macken seems to have put a special kick into this last performance in the Taibhdhearc. He will leave Galway next week to settle down in Dublin where he will become a member of the Abbey Theatre Company and devote a considerable amount of his time to play and novel writing.

Shortly afterwards, Walter Macken and his family moved to Dublin. It was to be a new beginning for him working solely as an actor and this allowed him time for his writing. The move also provided him with a national audience and within a relatively short time he was to become a prominent national figure not only as an actor and playwright but as a popular novelist.

His first performance in English as an Abbey player was in his own play, the Abbey Theatre's revival of *Mungo's Mansion*, in April 1948. He played the lead, Mungo King, in what may have been seen to be a shrewd move by the Abbey Theatre manager, Ernest Blythe; reviving a popular production with the author in the cast. This production appears to have been overlooked by Robinson (1951, 178) and Hunt (1979, 262) and others but not *The Irish Press* or *The Irish Times*.<sup>48</sup>

## The Theatre Manager and the emerging playwright (1939 – 1947)

Though he joined the Taibhdhearc in 1932, while still attending school, and worked there from 1935 to 1937, his involvement in the actual running and development of the theatre did not start until his return from England in 1939 when he took up the position of producer, actor, etc.

According to Bateman,

The artistic direction of the theatre under Macken continued much as it had done under Mac Diarmada. (2003, 19)

with a mixture of Irish and translated plays being performed.

His first production, already mentioned (**Picture 2.7**), was a translation of *Charley's Aunt* and this balance of Irish plays and translations continued throughout his years with the Taibhdhearc.

**Picture 2.16**, a cast photograph from *Charley's Aunt*



The cast names for *Charley's Aunt* in Macken's hand writing and a photograph of the set are copied to **Appendix 2.5**. These images are from the **Tom Kenny Collection**.

We mentioned earlier (Page 43) the Taibhdhearc Company season at the Gate Theatre in Dublin and saw the responses from the national press (often referred to as the Dublin press) to the plays and the poetry reading and to Macken the actor. We may assume that the early relationship

forged between the Taibhdhearc and Mac Liammóir and Edwards facilitated this opportunity for Taibhdhearc performances to be presented to Dublin audiences. By any standard this was an extraordinary event for the Taibhdhearc Company.

Over four nights the Taibhdhearc performed 4 short plays, 3 full-length plays and gave a poetry reading.

The opening night, Sunday 10 November 1940, was Oidhche an Uachtaráin (President's Night) and the programme consisted of three short plays and the recitation of 12 poems written by the President, Dr. Douglas Hyde, (Dúbhglas de hÍde), 'An Craoibhín Aoibhín'.

The plays were:

*Casadh an tSugáin*  
*Teach na mBocht*  
*An Pósadh* (see Appendix 2.6)

On Monday 11 November the Taibhdhearc presented the plays:

*The Monkey's Paw* (*Lapa an Ápa*) by W. W. Jacobs  
*Shadow of a Gunman* (*Scáil an Óglaigh*) By Seán O'Casey

One play was performed on Tuesday

*The Man in the Cloak* (*Fear an Chlóca*) by Louis D'Alton

The Taibhdhearc visit to the Gate Theatre was concluded on Wednesday with:

*Journey's End* (*Deireadh an Aistir*) by R. C. Sherriff

All the national papers reported on the plays as well as some of the provincial papers.

Attendances were mixed throughout the four night run. *The Irish Press* reporting on the first night wrote:

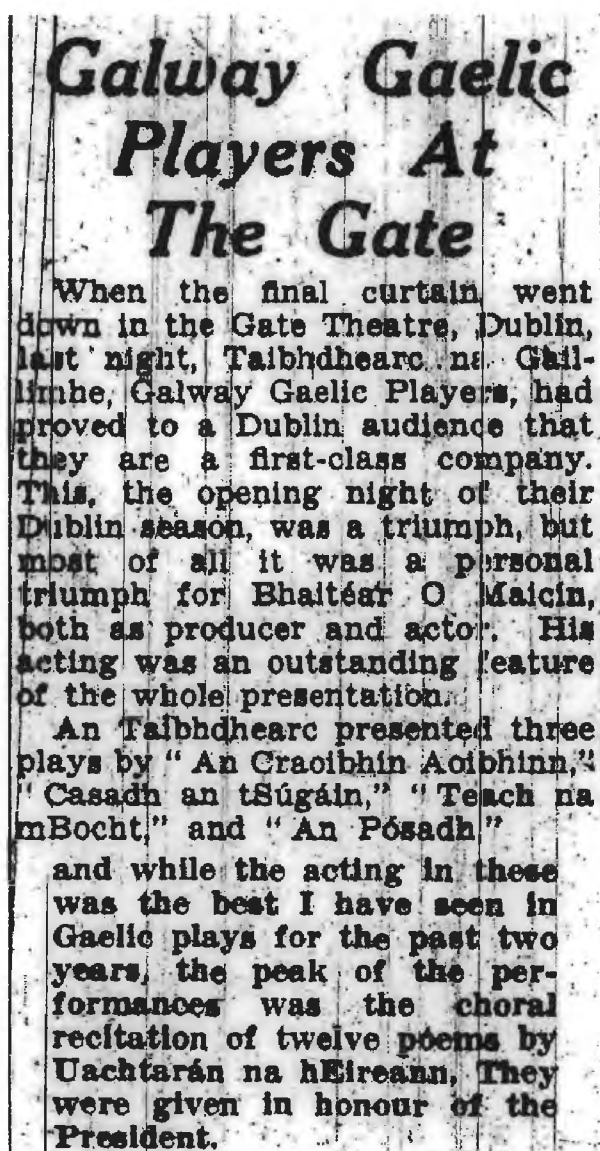
It was a pity there were so many empty seats in the theatre last night, and a better attendance during the week is expected.

*The Irish Times* review on the last night remarked in the opening paragraph

For the farewell performance of the Galway Gaelic Players last night, Dublin theatregoers, both Irish speaking and otherwise, filled the Gate Theatre – rather belatedly, and under strong provocation.

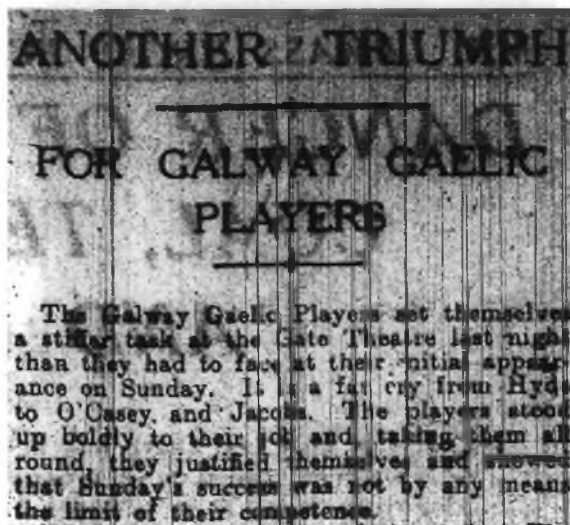
Of the opening night, *The Irish Press* reported (in part):

Picture 2.17



*The Irish Times* reporting on the second night wrote (in part):

Picture 2.18

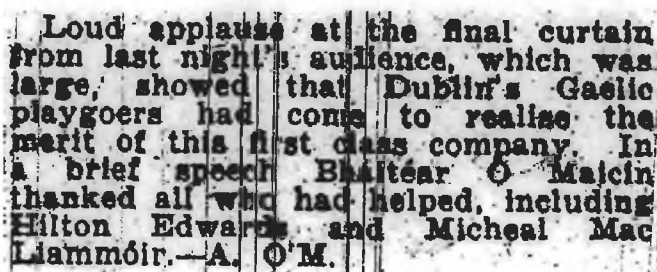


*The Irish Independent* reported on the Taibhdhearc performances on the Sunday, Monday and Tuesday. All their reports were in Irish. Reporting on the opening night they wrote:

.... Bhí an aisteoireacht ar fheabhas ar fad agus bhí an cainnt go liomhtha. Tá moladh mór- mór ag Bhaitear O Maicín a leirigh na dhramaí agus a réidhtigh an fhilideacht.

The final night was a particular success, playing to a full-house. *The Irish Press* concluded their report with this final comment

Picture 2.19



Macken's Taibhdhearc Company had prepared well for their Dublin performances. All of the plays presented were performed earlier that year or were part of their repertoire. The major works such as *Scáil an Óglaigh* (*Shadow of A Gunman*) had been performed in May, *Fear an*



*Chlóca* (*The Man in the Cloak*) in September and *Journey's End* (*Deireadh an Aistir*) in October before being revived for the Gate Theatre performances.

The Taibhdhearc Dublin season must have been a major commitment in time and finance for the company and it is not surprising to note that no further work appears to have been done by the company after the 13 November until 9 February 1941. What is surprising is that so few records remain of the event. Were it not for the reports in the newspapers it would be hard to find any other reference to the event. The Gate Theatre archive appears to have no record of the visit and this was also the case with the portion of the Gate archive sold to the Northwestern University Library<sup>49</sup>. The Northwestern University Library was able to confirm the dates by reference to their Douglas Hyde collection.


Press Cuttings Book 19 has a newsclipping from the *Carlow Nationalist* [see **Footnote: 2.1**] of 16 Nov 1940 entitled, "Galway Gaels Triumph" which describes the performances that week by the visiting Galway Gaelic Players under producer/ actor Walter Macken.<sup>50</sup>

One copy of the programme from the Gate presentations is held in the Wuppertal Macken archive<sup>51</sup>. **Appendix 2.7** shows the front page and the cast.

One aspect of the preparation does seem to have caused Macken some concern and that relates to the approval from O'Casey for the translation and performance of *Scáil an Óglaigh* (*Shadow of a Gunman*). The O'Casey papers at the National Library of Ireland<sup>52</sup>, holds a letter dated 22 November 1940 from Macken to O'Casey explaining the situation and apologising for the delay (**Picture 2.20**).

The O'Casey reply accepting the explanation is dated 26 November 1940 (**Picture 2.21**).

Picture 2.20



# L TAIBÉARC NA GAILLIMÉ

Ceantar: An tO.C. Dúchas  
 Scriobtoir: An t-Ollamh D. De Mairéad,  
 An t-Ollamh Cúlan Ó Dúchas,  
 Léasú Ó Deagáin,  
 Tomás Ó Máille.

Léingscáil 7  
 Dáimheas: Dúchas Ó Maoin.  
 Rannas: Maire Nic Siolla Máire.

Seán Ó Casey,  
 Ceannas,  
 Beirne.

**GAILLIMÉ, 22-11-1940**

A DANA,

On the 11 th of Nov. last we produced a translation into Irish of your plea y, "The Shadow of a Sunman". We had written to Messrs Samuel French asking about the professional charges, but they had changed their address. We were on the second of the month and got no reply until we were actually in Dublin. They informed us that you yourself dealt personally with enquiries. I am terribly sorry about this delay and can assure you that it will never occur again. The total takings in the face for the night of the 11 were £10 - 18 - 0 and if you let us know your charges we will forward a cheque immediately. I am enclosing a newspaper cutting and a copy of the programme in case you would be interested in them.

Thanking you and again apologising for the awful delay,

Yours sincerely,  
*St. Peter 26.11.40.*  
 Watten Wicken.  
 Manager & Producer.

*copied on 2nd Dec 1940*



Picture 2.21: Letter from Sean O'Casey dated 26 November 1940, addressed to Walter Macken at the Gaelic Theatre, Galway, regarding performance fees for 'The Gunman' <sup>53</sup>.

November 26 1940

tingrith  
station road totnes devon  
totnes 2359

Walter Macken, Esq.  
Gaelic Theatre, Galway.

Dear Mr Macken: French  
control only the amateur rights of the  
plays, sold, alas! to them when I was  
on the rocks.

The delay you mention  
doesn't matter much. The fee for  
the performance of "The Gunman", &  
for all subsequent performances  
is, & will be, the one point by the  
Abbey Theatre, namely: 5% on the  
gross nightly receipts up to £40.  
over 40 & up to 60, 7½%, over  
£60. 10%. So your fee will be  
5% on the receipts of £10.18.0.

I hope this may be suitable.  
With all good wishes

Sean O'Casey

In 1940 the Taibhdhearc produced sixteen different plays in total. Some of these were shorter plays and on two occasions three such plays were combined for performance. For example, in June, *Lapa an Ápa* (*The Monkey's Paw*) by W. W. Jacobs, *Eirighe na Gealaighe* (*The Rising of*



*the Moon*) by Lady Gregory and *An Fear Siubhail (The Travelling Man)* by Lady Gregory formed the programme.

1941 saw 8 full length productions including translations. Among the translations were: *An tImpire Mac Seoín (The Emperor Jones)* by Eugene O'Neill, (Picture 2.22), *An Sgiúrsa Bhán (The Power and the Glory)* by Karel Capek (Picture 2.23 & 2.24), *Macbeit (Macbeth)* by Shakespeare and a revival of the *Shadow of a Gunman*.

Picture 2.22

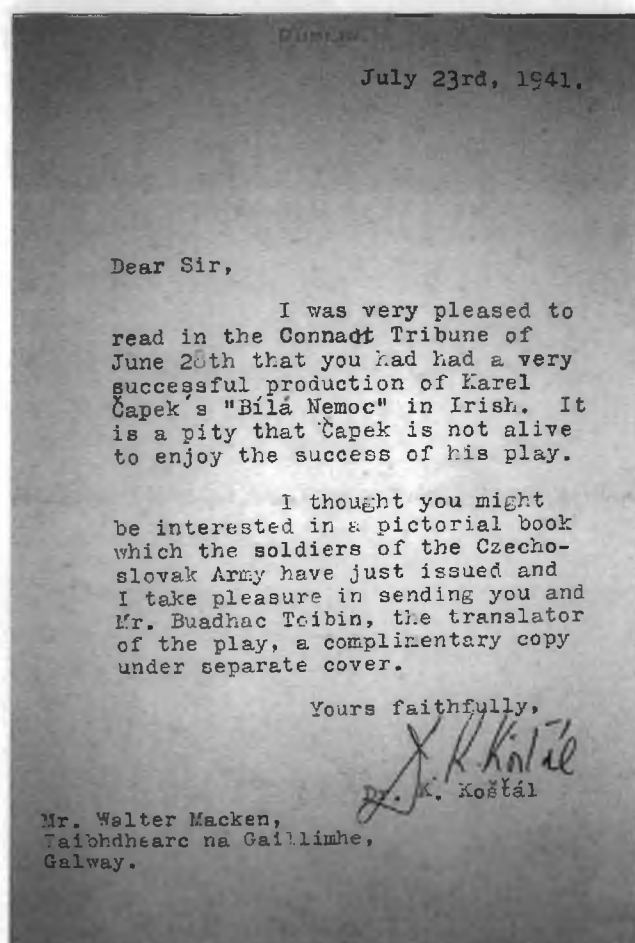


Taibhdhearc na Gaillimhe in 1941,  
Advertising *An tImpire Mac Seoín* by Eugene O'Neill.

Tom Kenny Collection

The Taibhdhearc production of *An Sgiúrsa Bhán* (*Power and Glory*) by Karel Capek came to the attention of the Czech representatives in Ireland and prompted the Czechoslovak Consul in Ireland to write to Macken on his '...very successful production...'.<sup>54</sup>

**Picture 2.23:** From the Czechoslovak Consul in Ireland, dated 23 July 1941.<sup>54</sup>



*The Connacht Tribune* did give some advanced publicity to this play with a piece in the 21 June in the City Edition, page 6. The paper also carried a two-column advertisement for the production.

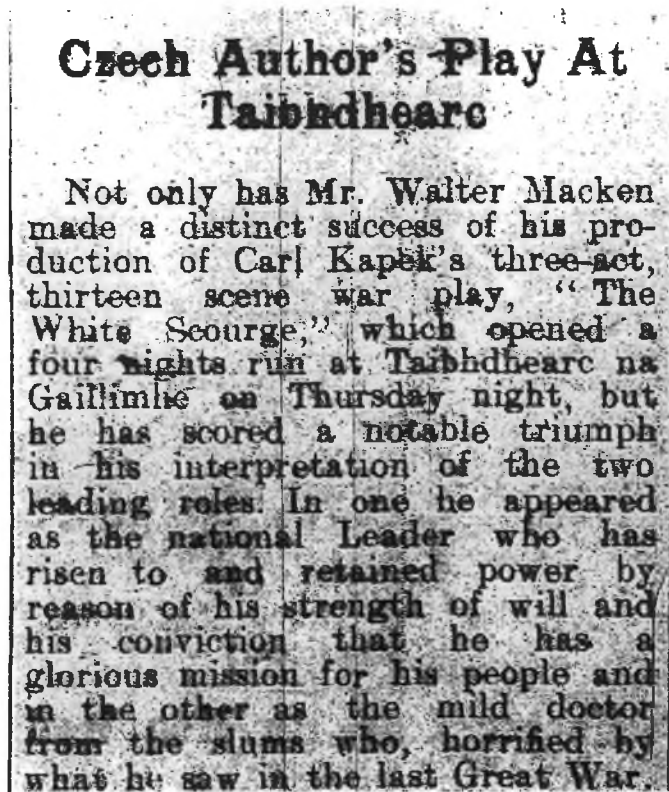
### *The White Scourge*

#### Capek Play at Taibhdhearc

Beginning June 26<sup>th</sup>, for four nights, the Taibhdhearc Company will present Karl Capek's world-famous play, 'The White Scourge' or 'Power and Glory'....

It is a three-act play with thirteen scenes of amazing dramatic intensity and has been translated by Buadhac Toibin, whose previous translations have made a name for him and it will be produced, with an excellent cast by Walter Macken.

The Connacht Tribune report mentioned by Dr. K. Košťál in his letter appeared on page 2. The reporter was impressed with Macken's performance. Picture 2.24 reproduces the review (in part) to complement the congratulatory letter.



*The Connacht Sentinel* on the 24 June (page 2) also carried the two column advertisement but no review. [As an aside, it is interesting to reflect on Dr. Košťál wartime reading of the Irish papers, which was indeed impressively thorough, and that Czech war-time intelligence collecting included *The Connacht Tribune*!]

1942 saw the presentation of *Mary Rose* by J. M. Barrie, *An Céachta agus na Réalta* (*The Plough and the Stars*) by Seán O'Casey among the nine productions. This time Macken made no delay in writing to O'Casey for permission. This letter was dated the 30 October 1942 and it confirmed the Irish title for the play and that it was 'translated by our best translator, Buadhach



Toibín’<sup>55</sup>. O’Casey replied to Macken on the 4 November 1942. This is a long letter that first addresses the royalty question and then goes on to discuss ‘the work of Gaelicising Eire...’<sup>56</sup>. These two letters are reproduced in full in **Appendix 2.8**. O’Casey acknowledged receipt of the Taibhdhearc cheque in his letter dated the 24 November 1940<sup>57</sup>.

His feeling on the translations of his work to Irish was mentioned by O’Casey in a letter written to Jack Carney (1988-1956), the Irish journalist and union organiser on the 4 November 1942.

In this letter O’Casey wrote:

....and they translated *The Plough* to Irish and put it on in Galway! March on! March on!  
That won’t bring in much. £1 or so; but strangely enough, I feel rather elated about it!  
(Krause, 1980, 85)

Macken had contributed as a writer to some of the early Taibhdhearc shows and his first full-length play written in Irish, *An Cailín Aimsire Abú* was staged in September 1943 and revived by the Taibhdhearc in 1946. His next play in Irish, *Bhí Mac Agam Tráth*, was directed by him for Litheas Órga Chonradh na Gaeilge for its only performance on the 17 October 1943. His third play, *Oighreacht na Mara*, was first performed in June 1944 with repeat performances in July and August that year. It was revived in May 1945 immediately before its Abbey run. Macken’s next play, *An Fear Ón Spidéal*, received its first production in July 1945.

All, except *Bhí Mac Agam Tráth*, were revived by the Taibhdhearc in later years and were part of the Taibhdhearc repertoire when they first presented Macken’s English language plays in translation. In May 1958 *An Cailín Aimsire Abú* was revived. The following year *Bua an Bháis* (*Twilight of a Warrior*) had its first performances in Galway and in 1960 *An Fear Ón Spidéal*, was again revived. All were directed by Traolach Ó hAonghusa. Ó hAonghusa again revived both *An Cailín Aimsire Abú* and *An Fear Ón Spidéal* in 1966. Tom Kenny’s records show that *An Cailín Aimsire Abú* was played at the Taibhdhearc in April 1982 (missing from the NUIG Booklet).

Macken took the Taibhdhearc Company with his play *Oighreacht na Mara* to the Abbey Theatre, Dublin in 1945 for performances on the 27 and 28 May.

Picture 2.25

# AMHARCLANN na MAINISTREACH

(Thar ceann an Chomhair Drámaíochta)

DIA DOMHNAIGH agus DIA LUAIN, 27ú agus 28ú Bealtaine, 1945.

## OIGHREACTH NA MARA

Dráma Trí-Ghníomh le Bhaitéar Ó Maicín  
Ghá léiriú ag

### FUIREANN TAIBHDHEARC na GAILLIMHE

AISTEOIRÍ

MAIRTÍN BREATHNACH, Iasgaire de chuid an Chladaigh	Seán Mac Labhraidh
PEIG, a bhean	Peig Ní Mhaicín
NÓRA, a inghean	Íde Ní Mhathghabhna
SEÁN, a mhac	Bhaitéar Ó Maicín
TÍMÍN, leannán Nóra	Domhnall Ó Ríordáin
SORCHA NÍ NEACHTAIN, leannán Sheáin	Eibhlín Ní Bhriain
PAT Ó LEIGEARTAIGH	Seán Ó hÓdhráin
TOM, cara le Seán	Gearóid Ó Máille
SEÁN Ó DOMHNAILL	Tomás Ua hFálúighthe

GNÍOMH A I: Cistin tíghe Mhúirtín Bhreathnach sa gCladach. Oíche Shathairn.

GNÍOMH A II: Ar thaobh Cbátáibh sa gCladach, oíche Domhnaigh dár gcionn.

GNÍOMH A III: An t-ionad ceadna le gníomh a bAon, maidin Luain dár gcionn.

Beidh Sosanna Deich Neomat tar eis Gníomh a I, agus Gníomh a II.

Léiritheoir: Bhaitéar Ó Maicín.

Feisteas Stáitse: Cara Donagh.

AN CHEOLFHUIREANN

Seinnfidh an Cheolfhuireann na dréacht seo leanas:

Túisceol	Euryanthe	Weber
Fuinne Ghaelacha		
(a) Amhrán—Caoineadh Dheirdre	Carl Hardebeck	
(b) Sreath d'Fhonnaibh Gaelacha	Ua Frighil	
Sreath	Amhráin na n-Oileán Tiar	
	cór. Kennedy Fraser	

NA CAITHTEAR TOBAC

The Irish Times report on the play on the 28 May 1945 was on page 1:

Galway Irish Players  
At Abbey Theatre

Taibhdhearc na Gaillimhe, the Galway Irish-speaking Company had a hearty welcome last night on its second visit to Dublin, this time to the Abbey Theatre, Dublin, in *Oighreacht na Mara* by Bhaitéar Ó Maicín, a three act drama of the 'Claddagh' little fishing community. Dublin had an opportunity of contrasting the material and the acting which have distinguished this Gaeltacht Theatre. The contrast with Dublin Companies was striking, and always in favour of Galway.

The author mixed his drama with Claddagh irony and humour but piled too many tragedies into too few people and slipped rather easily at times into sentimentality and speechifying and the final decision of the son of the house struck rather a false note.

As the son himself, Ó Maicin once again displayed his fine acting qualities but in the parts of the father and his fellow fishermen - both excellently played ... - and of the mother ... his characters never came alive. ....

The production by the Author was unusually interesting. (Footnote 2.2)

In Ernest Blythe's report to the Abbey Directors, 24 May 1945, which they 'noted', he mentioned '.... There seems to be a certain amount of interest in the forthcoming performance by the Galway Players, and their visit will give us an opportunity of comparing what they can do and what we are doing.'

(NFC 98, Volume 10)

Unfortunately, the next meeting in the archive is dated 5 July 1945 and these minutes make no further reference to the Taibhdhearc visit.

Ernest Blythe was also a member of the Board of Choiste an Comhair (An Comhar Dramíochta). They appeared satisfied that the Taibhdhearc were to perform at the Abbey. An Comhar, a State funded organisation, was contracted with the Abbey Theatre for the production of Irish language plays at the theatre each year and was also a supporter of the Abbey's Irish language pantomime.

In the minutes of the Choiste on the 20 March 1945 Ernest Blythe reporting on the present season for Irish plays told the other Directors

.... Maidir leis an seasur seo, bhi sgeal aige o Bhaitear O Maicin gha radh go mbeadh se sasta teacht le Complacht na Gaillimhe ag deire Bealtaine chun *Oighreach na Mara* do leiriu da mba mhian leis an gComhar e.

**Footnote 2.2:** The report is verbatim from *The Irish Times*, including their spelling of the title. The microfilm quality available from the National Library of Ireland is poor and it is difficult to make a clean copy.

The Coiste minute on the 12 June 1945 recorded under the heading ‘AN DA LEIRIU DHEIRIDH:

Thug Earnan de Blaghd cunntas ar an da dhrama deiridh. D’aontuighh a raibh I lathair do’n Choiste nach raibh *An tUdar I nGleic* ro-shasamhail ac gur dhein an leiritheoir a chuid obair go maith. Bhi an Coiste sasta freisin nar dheineadar aon dearmhad nuair a dhiultiomar cupla blain o o shoin, d’ *Oighreacht na Mara*.

(NFC 98, Volume 11, Footnote 2.3)

The Taibhdhearc Board minutes show that a form of ‘bonus’ operated for the full-time Taibhdhearc staff. Walter Macken received a ‘bonus’ payment of £3 in December 1939 and by 1946 this had increased to £20. The details of these payments and the payments to the other Taibhdhearc staff are in **Appendix 2.9**.

A view of Macken’s ideas and planned programme for the Taibhdhearc can be gleaned from his letter to Richard Fox (Footnote 2.4), dated 11 September 1947.<sup>58</sup> (**Appendix 2.10**)

In Macken’s letter to Fox he writes about the plays planned for production after September 1947: Molière’s *Bourgeois* [*Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*], *Ifigene* by Euripides, Shakespeare’s *Henry IV*, *Arrah-na-pogue* by Boucicault and ‘a few others sandwiched in.’ (Footnote 2.5)

This letter also mentions his contract for the production of *Mungo’s Mansion* in Flemish for audiences in Belgium and Holland and that he adjudicated the Oireachtas Drama.

**Footnote 2.3:** This one book of Choiste an Comhair Board minutes is filed with the Abbey Theatre minutes as Volume 11. It appears that the Coiste minute book arrived at the National Library with the Abbey minute books and will continue to be stored with this accession. The quotes from the minute book are as recorded.

**Footnote 2.4:** Richard Michael Fox: 1891- 1969, historian, journalist, and socialist. 22 book titles to his name. He was married to Patricia Lynch, 1898-1972, author of children’s stories set mainly in Ireland. Her *Eibhlin agus Seamus* was translated to Irish in 1942 by Maighréad Nic Mhaicín (not related to Walter Macken)

**Footnote 2.5:** The translators’ (aistritheoir, aistrithe le ...) of the non-Irish language plays are recorded in the NUIG publication<sup>33b</sup>.



Walter Macken's departure from the Taibhdhearc must have been a snap decision. His letter to Richard Fox in September appears full of optimism and enthusiasm for the programme planned for the remaining months of 1947 and the early months of 1948. As well as listing the plays planned for performance he mentioned "a few others [plays] sandwiched in" and goes on to mention the success of the newly introduced 'season tickets' and his hope for 'good houses for all our plays'.

Yet, in just over two months from that date he had resigned and was on his way to the Abbey Theatre in Dublin.

Peggy Macken in her *Cursai* interview does throw some light on what may have happened between September and November that year.

#### Picture 2.27(a)

What about leaving the 'Taibhdhearc'?

People often have trouble with Directors. He spent years fighting for things which he felt would be an improvement for the future of the 'Taibhdhearc'. But he had a big disagreement with them about policy.

Was it because he wasn't doing enough native Irish Plays?

He was doing a great job with native Irish Plays and they were all praise for the Irish Plays and they were very difficult to get at the time. No. I don't remember the disagreement but I went to the last meeting in the 'Taibhdhearc' with him and it surprised me that your father never got angry. When he was angry he always flew into a temper and gave off in Gaelic, but this night he didn't. Then he wrote to the Abbey and said that he was ready to go to Dublin and they replied and said that they would be delighted to have him.

#### Picture 2.27(b)

Was it a pretty quick decision?

Yes, it always was with your father. He hadn't time to think about it. He said to me 'You stay with the boys until I find a place for us to live'. It took him four weeks to persuade the landlady to get rid of the lodgers that she had as he was going to bring his family to Dublin.

Tom Kenny Collection

Ernest Blythe reported to the Abbey Directors on the 20 November 1947 on a letter he received from Macken:

Walter Macken has written to me that he has made up his mind to leave the Taibhdhearc feeling that he has spent long enough in Galway. He does not want to go back to London and asks if we if we could find work for him as an actor in the Abbey. I am inclined to think that we ought to give him a trial. I have seen him act once, but I am told that he is quite good at character work, and he might later on turn in useful as an assistant producer. He is only 32 years of age though he looks at least 10 years older. He is going to call round about Christmas and discuss possibilities with me. I don't know how a man like him who has been producing and taking leading roles for some years and has been free from direction or interference would fit in with the work here, but if we gave him a trial we should soon see how he would shape.

The Abbey Directors decided:

It was agreed that Mr. Blythe should write to Professor Liam O Briain of Galway asking him what was his opinion of Walter Macken.

(NFC 98, Volume 12)

The Taibhdhearc held Board meetings on the 15 and the 27 of November 1947. Macken attended both meetings and from the minutes there is no indication of his intention to leave the theatre. The minutes of both Board meetings are reproduced in **Appendix 2.11**.

After the next report from Blythe on the 4 December 1947, the Abbey Directors agreed that 'Mr. Macken should be given a trial.'

Walter Macken came to see me and told me he is tired of the work in the Taibhdhearc involving as it does production acting and scene painting and secretarial duties. He now wants merely to act and try to do his best as an actor, using his spare time to write. I asked Liam O Briain about him and he says that he is a really good character actor and a very decent fellow. I have had the same information from others. In conversation with



him I was favourably impressed. I think that in view of the circumstances that we are not likely to see very much of Denis O'D in future he might be useful here. He is going to leave the Taibhdhearc in any case and if we cannot use him he will go to London. A good idea for trying him out here, might be to revive *Mungo's Mansion* with him in the name part and Harry Brogan playing Mowleogs as before. (Footnote 2.6)

*The Connacht Tribune* reported Walter Macken's resignation, on the 13 December, page 7, and a further and longer article appeared in *The Connacht Sentinel*, page 2, on the 16 December, Picture 2.28 and Appendix 2.12.

Picture 2.28

# Mr. Walter Macken Resigns From Taibhdhearc

*Connacht Tribune* 13 Dec 1947, p7

IN order to devote more time to literary work—the writing of plays and novels—and for contact and reference work in connection with his literary activity, Mr. Walter Macken has resigned his position as manager-producer of Taibhdhearc na Gaillimhe and intends to reside in Dublin.

Asked by a "Connacht Tribune" reporter if he intended to maintain his connection with the technical side of the theatre, he replied that he had asked the Abbey Theatre Directors if they would permit him to become a member of the Abbey Company and his request would probably receive favourable consideration.

Mr. Macken has been not alone manager and producer of the Taibhdhearc but he has played many of the heaviest roles in most of the plays that he had produced there; he has also painted sets for various plays and has undertaken a considerable amount of other technical work outside the duties of either a manager or producer.

All this has given him little time for literary activity, and certainly has given him no time for contacts and the reference work necessary for literary output. Despite that he has achieved distinct success in literary work in recent years. He found time to write a number of plays for the Taibhdhearc and one in English that was produced by the Abbey and in London, and he has also produced a novel which will be published shortly. Yet another play in English is now in his publishers' hands.

Such sustained work could not be continued if quality were to be maintained. He felt that the present was a particularly opportune time to sever his connection with the Taibhdhearc. That Theatre is now enjoying the most successful period of its existence. The fruits of twenty years' of hard work are now being reaped in large, regular audiences of faithful supporters; the Taibhdhearc has established a reputation for fine settings, com-



petent acting and a sound production, and Mr. Macken feels that its continued success is inevitable whoever is in charge.

Aged 31, Mr. Macken has been producer at the Taibhdhearc since 1939. He has produced 76 plays, six pantomimes, and various sketches, verse recitals, etc. He is the author of three plays in Irish. His works in English include the play, "Mungo's Mansion," which has been staged in the Abbey and in London. Productions in other countries are planned. He has recently written another play on life in Galway, and a novel which will be published in the spring in London and America.

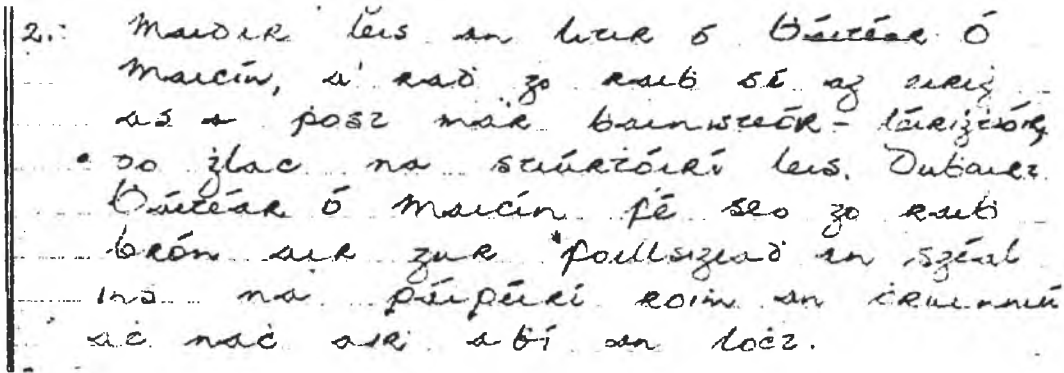
An account of Mr. Macken's work for Irish drama in the Taibhdhearc will appear in next Tuesday's "Connacht Sentinel."

Footnote 2.6: Please note that all quotations attributed to Ernest Blythe in this chapter without an NFC 98 reference come directly from the Abbey Theatre minute book. Those with this reference were taken from the Abbey Manager's reports held in the Blythe papers in the UCD archive department. They can also be found in the Abbey minute book for the quoted dates.

Both *The Connacht Tribune* and *Sentinel* reports pre-date the Board meeting of the Taibhdhearc Directors planned for 17 December and it would seem certain that all the Board members read of Macken's resignation in the local press.

The resignation of Walter Macken from Taibhdhearc na Gaillimhe was discussed by the Taibhdhearc Board members on the 17 December 1947. Item 2 of the minutes record this and include Macken's apology for the local newspapers having the story of his resignation before the Board had time to consider the matter.

Picture 2.29



2. Mairéad léis an t-uaire ó Baintéar Ó  
Mairéad, a' eas go raib sé ag cur  
as a post na baintéar - léiríocht  
• go ghlac na baintéar léis. Dubaile  
Baintéar Ó Mairéad fé seo go raib  
beón air gur \*pollsgead an tsíne  
na na baintéar roim an t-uaire  
a' na air a' b' an t-uaire.

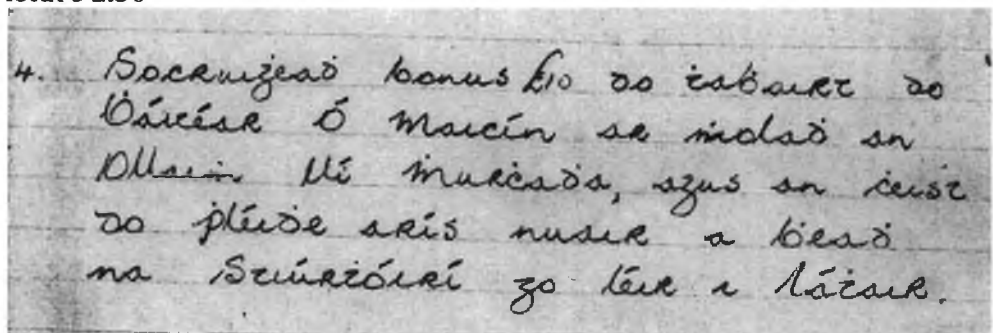
A copy of the Minutes of this meeting is attached as **Appendix 2.13**.

The Taibhdhearc Board at its unscheduled meeting on the 20 December 1947, and attended by Walter Macken, appointed Coiril Ó Mathúna (Cyril O'Mahony) as Manager (Bhainisteoir) of the theatre to start on the 9 January 1948 (**Footnote 2.7**)

**Footnote 2.7:** This was a departure from the Taibhdhearc practice of the manager/ producer. Coiril Ó Mathúna was a local primary school teacher and also a Taibhdhearc actor. The NUIG booklet <sup>33b</sup> records that he directed one play in May 1951. The next long serving director was Traolach Ó hAonghusa. He directed most of the Taibhdhearc plays between mid-1956 and 1968.

At their meeting on the 5 January 1948 the Taibhdhearc Board proposed a £10 bonus to be paid to Macken.

Picture 2.30



On Macken’s resignation Bateman reports in the Taibhdhearc 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary booklet

The minute book from the Abbey Theatre records that he had: ‘[grown] tired of the work in the Taibhdhearc involving as it does production, acting and scene painting and secretarial duties. (2003, 20)

[Also quoted in Pádraig Ó’Siadhail, *Stair Dhrámaíocht na Gaeilge 1990 – 1970*, Indreabhán, 1993, 113].

Stafford completes the quote from Ernest Blythe’s manager’s report to the Abbey Board on 4 December 1947:

He now wants to merely act and try to do his best as an actor using his spare time to write (2001, 23).

It may be useful to reflect at this point on Macken’s work load at the Taibhdhearc. The Taibhdhearc had three paid employees, Macken, Tomás Mac an Ríogh, the carpenter/ stage hand and a secretary.

Everything to do with the running of the Taibhdhearc and the staging of plays was Macken's responsibility. However industrious and enthusiastic Macken may have been, for any one person to maintain a work load that consisted of play selection (with the Taibhdhearc Board), recruiting actors, selecting the cast, directing the play, designing the set and building the set (no doubt with the assistance from others), acting in the plays, some translation but certainly collaborating with the translators, is a particularly demanding position. And when we include the politics of the theatre we may approach an understanding of the situation.

If we look at 1946 as an example of this commitment we find that the final performance for 1945 was on the 27-30 December. There was a pantomime on the 22-24 February 1947 and this was followed by full-length plays in April, June, September, October, November, a radio presentation of *Cathal Buidhe* on the 15 November and the final play of 1946 was on 5-8 December. This was followed by a similar commitment in 1947. This is a daunting work load for anyone, particularly when maintained for 9 years.

### **The Macken output during his years at the Taibhdhearc and his first English Language plays.**

Between April 1939 and his departure from the Taibhdhearc in January 1948, Walter Macken was responsible for 96 productions, including 76 plays. He acted in almost all of these productions.

Bateman writes:

Macken was a man who was extraordinarily industrious: he wrote, translated and directed plays; he acted, designed costumes and sets, provided support and encouragement to the actors around him, and provided a consistently high quality of staging. (2003, 19)

**Appendix 2.14** lists all the plays presented by the Taibhdhearc for the period 1938 to 1948.

Walter Macken started his writings for which he came to the attention of national audiences during this period of his life. We have already acknowledged his four plays written in Irish and first performed at the Taibhdhearc between 1943 and 1945 earlier in this chapter (Page 60).

In 1946, his first play in English, *Mungo's Mansion* opened at the Abbey Theatre, Dublin, on 11 February (Robinson, 1951, 176) with F. J. McCormick in the lead and Siobhan McKenna playing Nellie. Siobhan McKenna, to become one of Ireland's acclaimed actresses, had started her career under Macken at the Taibhdhearc before moving to the Abbey on a Comhar scholarship in 1944. (Hunt, 1979, 171)

*Mungo's Mansion* was reviewed by the three national papers on the following day <sup>59</sup>.

*The Irish Press* review by TW, under the heading 'Macken the O'Casey of the West' wrote:

Unless I am greatly mistaken, Walter Macken has done for Galway what Sean O'Casey has done for Dublin. *Mungo's Mansion*, which received its Irish premiere at the Abbey Theatre last night is an authentic dramatisation of a section of Irish life....Macken belongs to the modern realistic Ireland, which has little sympathy with John O'Leary's romantic Ireland. His drama is hard, and his mind works within the ambit of a State in which doles are more important than dreams....

The enthusiastic reception given by last night's audience showed that the time is ripe for such reorientation of public thought....

I imagine this play will have a good run because of its vitality and unusual quality.

*The Irish Times* was less complimentary. The reviewer, K, raised the 'inevitable comparisons' with Sean O'Casey and thought them '... not entirely to the advantage of Mr. Macken.' He describes the play in some detail and always in comparison with O'Casey's *Juno and the Paycock*, describing Mungo and Mowleogs as '...at best, pale shadows of Captain Boyle and Joxer Daly' that do not 'arrest us with the thought, "here is the body and soul of life" as O'Casey's characters do.'

J. F. for *The Irish Independent* leaves aside any comparison with O'Casey other than to remark that 'Walter Macken ... has taken for his subject a piece of slum life in Galway.' He also comments that

One can take it that there is a distinct difference between life in Buttermilk Lane in Galway and Marrowbone Lane in Dublin and that it is not a terrible picture of poverty and squalor that the author takes as his background.

This is an interesting comment when placed against the comment in paragraph 5 of *The Irish Press* review on the production. It also must question the use by TW of 'authentic dramatisation' in paragraph one.

Frank Dermody's production was as thorough and detailed as one would expect from a man who knows Galway intimately. One question arises to my mind: why did he direct settings so bright and cheery for what one believed to be a slum setting? The author's impression of squalor was lost entirely in the cosy room.

The only remark in *The Irish Times* about this aspect of the presentation was in K's final paragraph (**Footnote 2.8**):

One minor criticism of the production – would a lamed docker of King's class have worn quite such an elegant shoe as was presented to us by Mr. McCormick last night?

*The Irish Independent* reviewer commenting on the story-line wrote:

It is perhaps, a feeble enough basis for a story but the author carries his comedy along with the wealth of his dialogue and the picturesqueness of his characters.... His two characters, the tinker Mowleogs Canavan and the loquacious Winnie Gilhealy are his best achievements.

**Footnote 2.8:** Many of the early reviews written for the newspapers were without an indication of authorship. Where identified the practice was to use an initial or initials. For example, *The Irish Times* reviewer was 'K' and *The Irish Press* reviewers were 'TW' and AO'M, see **Picture 2.19**.

This modest level of success for Walter Macken was not reached without compromise with the Abbey Theatre manager.

The Abbey Theatre Board meeting minutes' shows that play, originally titled *Mungo and the Mowleogs*, had been approved by the Abbey reading committee (**Footnote 2.9**) for circulation to the Board members on 23 November 1944. By the 29 March 1945 the Board agreed to accept the play. In the manager's report, 'Noted' by the Directors and dated 12 April 1945, Blythe wrote:

In sending Walter Macken his contract, for *Mungo and the Mowleogs*, I told him that the Directors thought it needed cutting, particularly the first act. He says that he quite accepts that verdict he has cut other authors' plays many times and will not complain if his own is cut.

The question of the title came up later and on the 25 October 1945 the manager reported to the Board:

I feel that to give *Mungo and the Mowleogs* any chance, we will have to spend a bit more time on cutting it to get it up will be a slow business.

**Footnote 2.9:** All play readings of new works, works arising from competitions or works from established playwrights appear to have been done by the Abbey Directors in the early years of the theatre. The play writing competition in 1939, supervised by Brinsley MacNamara, attracted 78 plays. The short-listed plays including those with 'strong recommendation' from MacNamara were to be read by the Directors and those 'considered worth further consideration' were to be sent to the adjudicators. It would appear that this task of play reading by the Directors led directly to the introduction of a play reading policy. The policy was approved by the Abbey Directors at the Board meeting on 8 December 1939. The Board appointed Lennox Robinson (a Board Member) and Brinsley MacNamara 'as a reading committee' with the following brief. (1) They were to report on their findings to the Board and the Board would decide what plays were to be returned to the authors. (2) Plays recommended for revision were to be revised by the readers in 'conjunction with authors' and the re-writes to go to the Directors for decision. (3) Plays submitted by established authors were to go directly to the Directors for consideration. (NFC 98, Volume 8)



The minutes record that the manager received a letter from the author suggesting three alternative titles for the play, including the title *Mungo's Mansion*.

The Board agreed that *Mungo's Mansion* would be the most suitable title.

It also agreed that when Mr. Blythe and Mr. Dermody had made the suggested cuts the play should be sent to Dr. Hayes [Abbey Director] for re-reading.

The Blythe/ Dermody cuts were approved by Dr. Hayes and the focus turned to the play's final scene which was considered unnecessary:

I submitted to Dr. Hayes the cuts which Mr. Dermody and I made to *Mungo's Mansion* and he approved them. Apart from ordinary cutting, Mr. Dermody and I reached the conclusion that the final scene should be eliminated. It is the one in which Mungo through a timely miracle recovers the use of his leg. After so many startling things have already happened in the one afternoon covered by the play, the finish up with a miracle tends to make the whole piece ridiculous. We have already had the Mowleogs who was thought to have drunk the five shillings given to him to put on the horse turning up with a Sweep ticket for Mungo which has drawn a horse, seemingly a bad one. Then we have the horse coming in second in the race. Next we have Mrs. Manders murdered then we have her husband about to use the razor on Mungo who is only saved in the nick of time by the intervention of the Mowleogs. Almost immediately we have little Tommy rushed to hospital with diphtheria, and Mungo abandoning his oft-reiterated determination not to leave Buttermilk Lane.

Mr. Dermody and I think it would be a good thing if the play could stop at the point where Mowleogs begins to be pathetic over the prospective removal of Mungo from his old haunts and where he tearfully says that he will take to the road...

(NCF 98, Volume 10, 8 November 1945)

Blythe contacted Macken on this concern and in the minutes of the 29 November 1945 the Directors 'noted' the outcome.

I [Blythe] conveyed to Walter Macken our views about the end of *Mungo's Mansion* and had a very satisfactory reply. He wrote that he himself had begun to think that the cure of Mungo's leg should be cut out and he had prepared a new ending but was waiting to see whether or not we should be uneasy about the ending. He was greatly gratified that as he said we had studied the play so carefully and unsympathetically.

*Mungo's Mansion* was now an Abbey 'Forthcoming Production' and went into rehearsals where the play provided other problems. The Board minutes record:

Faults that were not noticeable in reading became so obvious on the stage that something had to be done to remedy them.

All are agreed that if *Mungo's Mansion* is to succeed, it must be slick and played fast.

In early January F. J. McCormick, who was playing Mungo King and 'was doubtful' about the play, now thought it would do well. After the dress rehearsal it was thought to need 'a little more polishing' and there was concern about the last few minutes of the play. On 14 February 1946, Blythe was able to report that the play was 'greeted rather enthusiastically by the audiences'. The play attracted very good audiences and the manager was satisfied to let it run for four weeks.

Blythe's opinion on the play was recorded in the Board minutes of 14 February:

... it is not a good play except for the Grand Guignoe [Guignol] bit. It is not drawn from life, but from O'Casey. However, its performance by a competent company should help Walter Macken do better work in future if he has it in him.

By the 28 February it was acknowledged in the Board minutes that

... *Mungo's Mansion* did marvellously good business during the first fortnight. Though the play was on the whole well received on the first night, some sections of the audience were far from enthusiastic and a real popular success was not altogether certain.

The record concluded:

Though the play gets tremendous laughter it suffers from the unreality of the characters and the thinness of the theme. It bears a second or third visit badly. Some members of the audience are adversely affected by its likeness to O’Casey but I gather the majority do not mind much.

Blythe, somewhat begrudgingly, was happy with the final outcome,

...Mungo’s Mansion did moderately well and we escaped making a loss.

(14 March 1946)

Picture 2.31: Cast page from week 3 of the Abbey Theatre’s production. <sup>60</sup>

# ABBAY THEATRE

DUBLIN

**Monday, 25th February, 1946, and following nights at 7.45**

**THIRD WEEK OF MUNGO'S MANSION**

A Play in Three Acts by Walter Macken

**CHARACTERS**

MUNGO KING	F. J. McCormick
MAKTEEN, his son	Michael O'Brian
NELLIE, his daughter	Slobhan Nic Chionnaith
WINNIE GILHEALY, known as "Winnie the Wild Duck"	Eileen Crowe
MATTHEW SKERRET, landlord's agent	Michael J. Dolan
MOWLEGG CANAVAN	Harry Brogan
JACK MANDERS	Denis O'Dea
MRS. MANDERS, his wife	Brid Ni Loinsigh
THE DOCTOR	Fred Johnson

**VOICES**

The National Theatre Society, Ltd.  
Leslie Robinson, Managing Director  
Lionel Blythe, General Manager  
Eric Cormack

There will be intervals of Ten Minutes between the Acts

Play Produced by FRANK LERMODY  
Setting by ALICIA SWEETMAN  
Stage Manager—U. WRIGHT

**ORCHESTRA**

F. M. MAY, Mus. Bac., Director  
ALICE MacCARTHY  
VIOLA O'CONNOR

The Orchestra will perform the following selections

Overture	Euryanthe	Water
Irish Airs	(a) Dirge of Ossian (b) Macnamara's Reel	and Lament
Excerpt	Trio in G Minor Op. 13 Presto	Concerto

The action takes place in the second survey of a house in Buttermilk Lane in the city of Galway.

Though there are two intervals during the performance the action is continuous and there is no lapse of time between the Acts.

TIME: The present.

SMOKING WILL NOT BE PERMITTED IN THE AUDITORIUM

Whatever satisfaction this first play and its first production at the Abbey Theatre may have given to Macken must have been dampened by the outcome of the London production. Performed by ‘The Company of Four’, at the Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith in early 1947 under the title *The Galway Handicap*, attendances were disappointing, affected by the severe weather

at the time.<sup>61</sup> The severe weather was referred to by Macmillan in their letter dated 13 March 1947.

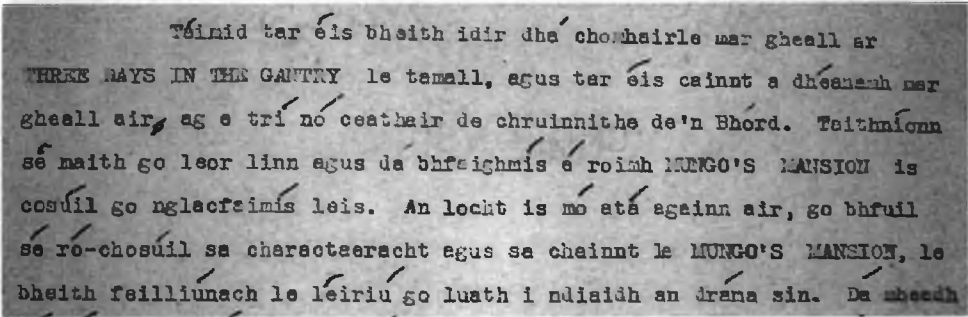
.... I am sure that you would have had good audiences at the Lyric for the whole run if it had not been for the weather and all the difficulties of travelling at a time of reduced services and renewed black-out ....<sup>62</sup>

According to *The Connacht Sentinel* on the 16 December 1947, his second English language play, *Vacant Possession*, was about to be published by Macmillan. It also reported that his first novel *Quench the Moon* which was completed in 1946 was due for publication by Macmillan in 1948.

An earlier version of *Vacant Possession*, called *Three Days in the Gantry* was submitted to the Abbey Theatre in 1946. The Directors agreed at their meeting on the 23 August 1946 ‘... that consideration of *Three Days in the Gantry* by Walter Macken should be postponed until the next meeting.’ (NFC 98, Volume 10) and at the 5 September meeting they ‘decided that the play should not be accepted.’ (NFC 98, Volume 12)

The reason given to Macken for the rejection, and mentioned in a letter from Ernest Blythe dated 20 September 1946, was that the characters and the language were too similar to those in *Mungo's Mansion*.<sup>63</sup>

**Picture 2.32:** Extract from the Blythe letter dated 20 September 1946



We can summarise the Macken contribution not alone to Taibhdhearc na Gaillimhe but also to the wider Irish theatre and the reading public during the period 1939 to January 1948 as:

- 96 productions including 76 plays at the Taibhdhearc
- His performances in all but 3 of the Taibhdhearc plays and in other productions
- Authorship of 4 full-length plays in Irish and many other shorter pieces
- Authorship of 1 full-length play in English
- His second full-length play in English due for publication
- His first novel due also for publication in 1948

A report in *The Irish Press* on 8 January 1948, page 5, quoted Professor Murphy, Chairman of the Taibhdhearc as saying at a presentation supper for the Mackens’,

Wally Macken was leaving for the Abbey Theatre because Dublin was the only place in the country where one could do anything that would resound not only through the country, but in Britain.

Perhaps in anticipation of his move to Dublin, Macken was also in touch with *The Irish Press* who published two articles by him on 24 and 31 January 1948. Both, with a theatre focus, were on page 3 of the paper. The first one under a banner headline ‘DOING ANYTHING TONIGHT.... Why not try the Theatre’ also had a picture of Macken, mentioning him as ‘now a member of the Abbey Theatre Company with the immediate problem “to find a flat in Dublin for himself, wife and children.”’ The article the following week was ‘WHAT IT TAKES TO MAKE AN ACTRESS. These girls have got it’, featured Siobhan McKenna, Brid Ni Loingsigh and Maire O Donnell.

### **Life at the Taibhdhearc in the 1940s**

Walter Macken worked at the Taibhdhearc from April 1939 until January 1948.

The Taibhdhearc employed very few people. It is likely that only Macken, Tomás Mac An Riogh, the stage hand, and a secretary were permanent employees. The directors received no payment. The actors were unpaid but the manager with the approval of the directors did encourage the performers to see themselves as semi-professionals rather than purely amateur

actors. As a result, the actors received scaled payments depending on their roles and their perceived importance to the company.

Indications of such payments can be seen on some Taibhdhearc programme cast pages where someone had written the recommended or approved payments for a performance. This practice started in the 1930s’ and continued during Macken’s time as manager.

This example is from the 1936 performance of Molière’s *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* and is from the **Tom Kenny Collection**. Walter Macken was employed by the Taibhdhearc in 1936 and received a weekly wage (Page 26) and as a result did not receive the pay for performance payments.

Picture 2.33

fuirceann	
Mgr. Jourdain .....	Dáirear Ó Maicín.
Mdm. Jourdain .....	Síle Mc Pionláir. <i>£</i>
Lucille .....	Eóin ní Sólleabán. <i>£</i>
Cleonte .....	Tomár Ó h-Galungá. <i>£</i>
Hermione .....	Pers ní Cunnig.
Dorante .....	Phionnpar Mac Diarmada.
Nicola .....	Máire Mc Siolla Máiream.
Cobhielle .....	Uinníonn Ó Matúna. <i>£</i>
Margirear Céol .....	Máirear Ó Flaibeapraig.
A Sgoilte .....	Tomár Mac dothágán.
Margirear Rince .....	Seán Ó Conéubair.
Margirear Pionnóiríocht .....	Seán Ó Laugaire. <i>10/-</i>
Máirear Feallpáiníocht .....	Máirear Ó Dipeáin. <i>10/-</i>
Caillín .....	Seán MacGadhna.
Chiorcáir Tuntáir.	
Donnchad .....	Liam Ó Donnghaille.
Donnchad .....	Rinneoirí Insean Uí ndrógáin.
Donnchad .....	Ungro Deán Uí h-Galungá. <i>£</i>
Donnchad .....	Fear Mac dothágán.

The Taibhdhearc recruited actors locally also from the army and from University College Galway Drama Society. Macken would have done such recruitment during his time as manager/producer.

My account of Macken's time at the Taibhdhearc to his leaving has presented the facts of his career supported by published materials and also using some of Macken's own writings. This part of the Chapter on his day-to-day management is devoted to some of the people who were actors with the Taibhdhearc at this time.

All of the Taibhdhearc actors from the 1940s are now over 80 years of age. I discussed the idea of meeting past actors from the Taibhdhearc with Sean Stafford, a retired actor, director and former member of the Taibhdhearc Board. Stafford came to the Taibhdhearc in 1948 after Macken had left for the Abbey Theatre and was active in the theatre until 2006. He introduced me to Eamon Mc Donagh. Tom Kenny from Kenny's Art Gallery, Liosbán Retail Park, Tuam Road, Galway, mentioned Mairead Concannon and I was able to meet her through a family contact. Lastly, Mairead Concannon provided me with the telephone number for Íde Ní Mhathúna (Ita O'Mahony) a prominent Taibhdhearc actor at the time who left the Taibhdhearc for the Abbey Theatre, Dublin, before Macken's own departure for the Abbey. I discussed my work with each of them, emphasising that my interest was in their memories of their times at the Taibhdhearc and their views on working there under Macken. After these initial conversations, I met with each of them for our focused conversation. These conversations were recorded.

The recorded conversations were typed and by their very nature there was some repetition and some material that was not relevant. The raw text was edited heavily to highlight the individual experiences and opinions of the former Taibhdhearc actors. The abridged versions of the conversation were approved by each participant and they agree that the transcripts be included in my work. The complete text of each conversation has been retained for cross checking should it become necessary.

Each abridged conversation is available in **Appendix 2.15** where I have also included a brief description of the three contributors so as to give some understanding to the reader of their standing in the Taibhdhearc. These brief descriptions were also agreed with the contributors and include some of their performances at the Taibhdhearc with local reviews/ reports.

The following are some main points from the conversations:



(1) I met **Éamonn Mach Dhonnchadha** (Eamon McDonagh), b. 1926, at his home in Furbo, Co. Galway on 14 April 2008.

The McDonagh family were shopkeepers and had a general grocery shop in Sea Road, Galway. Eamon worked at the shop before being employed in Galway by Thomas McDonagh and later by McDonagh Milling and Trading.

Eamonn gave me an account of how he joined the Taibhdhearc and his time there as an actor. What follows is a summary of that conversation.

In the mid-1940s he was seen performing by Macken in play with the Legion of Mary for Cumann Drámaíochta na Scoile in Éireann <sup>64</sup>. Macken was the adjudicator. The play was in Irish. Eamonn was approached by Macken and became a long serving member of the Taibhdhearc.

His memory tells how he was approached, his first meeting with Macken and his first part in *Drama at Inish*, in April 1946. Eamonn found Macken as a director ‘...easy to work with...’

I always found him that little bit kind, helpful, he never scolded me much over anything, he left a lot to myself, I used to be amazed at it at times.

Eamonn’s excellent Irish was also a help to him and to Macken in unexpected ways from time to time:

He [Macken] always took a part. He always took the lead actually. I thought he was quite good, quite good and every single part he had he seemed to have me behind him all the time. If you look at the picture there you see the same thing, right behind him all the time.

**Picture 2.34**



*Cathal Buidhe le Eibhlín Ní Bhaoighill, 20-23 May 1946*  
Left to right: Séamus Breathnach, Walter Macken, Liam Ó Floinn,  
Eamon Mac Donnchadha, Aodh Mac Dhubháin. [NUIG archive]

The reason for that in my opinion, I dare not say that was because he did not always have his words good, off by heart, or rehearsed better. He always leaned on me because I always had my words and I have plenty of free Irish and I could tip off the words like that and switch them around. He relied on me mostly to give him his answer at times.

Eamonn went on to talk about rehearsals, the dress-rehearsal show for the local clergy, Macken's view on Galway and the local people and other matters. On Macken's surprise resignation he said:

I was there when he left and I got the shock of my life and I lost all interest in the Taibhdhearc after he left. A lot of them lost interest after he left. Macken was a great adviser though he was not a man who tried to change your part or get you to do it in a different way. I felt left out of it and I felt very lonely.

Eamon McDonagh stayed on at the Taibhdhearc into the 1950s when pressure of work did not allow him the time necessary to continue his commitment.

The way it was with me I could not get away from the bloody parts. The time I was there I was in every single damn thing except one play where there was only two lads and a girl as far as I remember.

(2) **Mairead Concannon** (formerly Ní Fhloinn), b.1925, was at the Taibhdhearc, mainly as an actor, over two separate periods of time. She joined the Taibhdhearc in 1946 and stayed until the early 1950s. Her second period was from 1969 when she returned to Galway after a time living on the Aran Islands. Our conversation took place at Mairead's home in Renmore, Galway, on the 30 September 2008.

Mairead worked as a civil servant, She was transferred to the revenue office in Galway, situated in the Custom House, a short distance from the Taibhdhearc. She attended an all-Irish school and as well as speaking Irish she also had an interest in the language. She had heard about the Galway Irish theatre and having an interest in theatre called in and met Walter Macken

He asked me 'What are you interested in?' I said 'I would be interested to come here to see you first and to see what is going on.' He said 'would you ever think of acting here?' I said 'of course if you considered me good enough'. 'I'll give you a try' he replied.

Her first part was in Macken's revival of his own play, *An Cailín Aimsir Abu*, in October 1946. She describes how particular Macken was about the Irish language, describing him as having a 'good grasp of Irish' and that 'he was able to get the nuances across and advise us how to do it [during rehearsals] so that we got on very well.' She also made the point about the differences between good Irish speakers and native speakers.

Now, at the Taibhdhearc, they were not all native speakers at the time. The native Irish speakers instead of being a help might even have been a hindrance because some of the dialect went so fast it was indistinct that they had to be slowed down.

She mentions the audiences for the plays, the special show for the clergy, the critics of their standards of Irish, the end of run party and a range of other relevant aspects of life at the Taibhdhearc. She also described meeting the Taibhdhearc directors as 'a bit daunting to us. We were only young people just left school and they were professors so we were more or less silent'.

She described Macken as doing everything in the Taibhdhearc.

He designed the sets, Tommie King, the carpenter, constructed them to his design and I think Peggy used to paint them. Some of us would help her of course but Peggy used to paint them, as I remember. Now there was a prop room but props came from our own houses wherever we lived we took them along for the duration of the play and took them home again. Costumes, ... we hired... from Dublin.

When he was on the stage with us, even with the most experienced, he was still the master so there was always deference to him. Those of us who were smart enough at the time, we always copped-on and learned a bit. I remember we learned watching other actors ... otherwise we had no instruction except Wally who had to look after the lines of the play and the movement on stage.

She mentions how the players got along '...very well. There was no rivalry .... We were teachers, civil servants, people who worked in shops, the lads from the army and students.'

Rehearsals were a mixture of English and Irish. Even in Wally's time. Wally was quite fluent in Irish but there was certainly a mixture of English and Irish and as I have already said there would have been complaints because of the variety of Irish, particularly with the students from Donegal, Kerry and our own native speakers from Connemara and the Islands. The mingling of those dialects was always confusing to people. There were teachers and school inspectors who came

and criticised those that did not have good 'book' Irish, school Irish, 'an gramadach'.

She describes Macken's handling of rehearsals as '... very firm and very strict and also very patient'.

When I would see him up on stage it was like military control. He knew exactly the position for everyone and that he had to get right. There couldn't be masking and you always had to be in sight for everybody from all corners of the theatre. He knew that instinctively. About entrances, he said 'you walk on with aplomb'.

Mairead remembers that the people of Galway were proud of the Taibhdhearc as an Irish theatre because it was unique and considered that the audiences were good but at times small.

On Macken's resignation in 1947 she says that they were all surprised and thought it was only temporary.

When Wally left we were all surprised. We thought that it was only temporary. We weren't told what went on.

Wally Macken was an exemplary man. He was very philosophical about life and I think he was very patient because of that. We were never told about any conflict or any row between himself and the directors. Whatever happened we never knew. Wally was missed. The grá, the sean-grá wasn't there. After that we weren't a family any more. Then, you see, we were never paid except the few shillings after each play. We called it a donation. It wasn't tuarastal [wages] anyway.

The atmosphere in the Taibhdhearc changed after he left, it did, actually it did. We were lonely. The girls were particularly lonely for Peggy. We liked Peggy Macken very much. She was really one of ourselves and we missed them very

much. Tommie King was heart broken although Wally did give him a hard time now and again.

**Picture 2.35**



*An t-Ean Príosúin (The Jail Bird)* le George Shiels, 14-17 September 1948  
Left to right: Micheál MacGiolla Ceallaigh, Risteárd Ó Riain, Séamus Breathnach, Máighréad Nic Fhlionn, Máighréad Nic Donnchadha [NUIG Archive]

Wally and Peggy were so involved in the theatre that they were not party to a circle of outside friends. Not really. They were very, very, very private. Well I think Wally's mind was always on notions, ideas, things, I wasn't surprised when he started writing and made a success of it. He lived in another world. The rest of us acted. It was a very happy atmosphere. We made great friends that lasted a lifetime, I can say that definitely. It's a good thing to say.

(3) **Íde Ní Mhathúna**/ Idhe Ní Mhathghamhna (Ita O'Mahony), b. 1924, joined the Taibhdhearc about 1944 as a secretary before being 'converted' to one of the Taibhdhearc's prominent performers in the 1940s'. She was a sister of Cyril O'Mahony, (see **Footnote 2.7**, page 68). Her first performance at the Taibhdhearc was *An Stoirm* by Alexandre Ostrovsky, 11-14 May, 1944. The play was directed by Macken who also played in it.

Ita left the Taibhdhearc in 1947 to join the Abbey Theatre Company in Dublin. Her letter of resignation <sup>65</sup> dated the 3 October 1947 was addressed ‘Don Bainisteoir’ with the opening greeting: ‘A Bháitéar a chara,’ mentions her going to Dublin on the 15 October.

Walter Macken joined the Abbey Company in 1948 and Íde performed with him during his time there. She continued as an Abbey actor into the 1950s’ and her last play with the Abbey Company was Macken’s *Home is the Hero* in 1952 at the Queen’s Theatre.

(Footnote 2.10)

My conversation with Ita O’Mahony took place at her home in Sandymount, Dublin, on 26 March 2009.

It’s such a long time ago:- but I think I was about 20 when I joined the Taibhdhearc. I had already been a member of an orchestra which was founded by Fr. Mallon. I loved that, but, when rehearsal times began to clash – I had to make a choice and stayed with the Taibhdhearc.

The Taibhdhearc had employed a secretary and at that time the position was vacant. Walter Macken was ‘trying to cope with the secretarial work as well as being actor, manager, producer, set designer, etc., and he asked me if I would take it over and I did.’

There were always efforts to secure original plays in Irish and of course Wally himself provided most of these. International plays were translated mostly by Aodh Mac Dhúbháin (Hugh McGuane)....

We all looked forward to gathering for a new production. Wally would have done the casting and we would read through the play, being very conscious of playwright’s descriptions of characters and direction of movement.

**Footnote 2.10:** My conversation with Ita ranged over her acting career from 1944 to her departure from the Abbey Theatre in 1952. As a result it anticipates the next chapter, Chapter 3: Walter Macken and the Abbey Theatre. It seems sensible and appropriate not to attempt any separation of Ita’s contribution and to view it not just as her memories of her Taibhdhearc days but also as an introduction to Chapter 3.



We were amateurs of course and there was none of the stress of playing to full houses – indeed audiences were sparse but we had a faithful following of people who had a great desire to keep the Irish language alive and we were keenly interested and there was always I think, a sense of emptiness when the curtain came down on the last night of a production.

It wasn't professional theatre. At the end of the run we would get 10/- each. I cannot hear Wally's voice telling me to move here or the move there, you see he was always on stage with us. He was in every play with us. I can't remember Wally talking to us from the auditorium. I think he had it all worked out and he was on stage with us. I don't think there was any play he wasn't in. The play I remember most was *Oighreacht na Mara*. Another was *An Fear ón Spidéal*. Wally was wonderful in the pantomime. He used songs from the times translated to Irish.

**Picture 2.36**



Peggy Kenny, Walter Macken and Ita O'Mahony,  
*Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* by Molière, (2-5 October 1947)

Tom Kenny collection

Ita goes on to talk about her move to the Abbey and mentions Macken's feelings at the time and him seeing her off to Dublin at the railway station. Macken leaving the Taibhdhearc and Galway surprised her. She did not see much of him during his days at

the Abbey Theatre. 'He would be at rehearsals and then at home. He would not have been knocking around with the rest of us'.

She played with Macken in many of the Abbey plays during his stay with the company and these included *The King of Friday's Men* where she played Kitty.

...it was in M. J. Molloy's *The King of Friday's Men* that Wally playing Bartley – so very suited to his natural talent, brought him special notice and invitations to Broadway and I think Hollywood. (Robinson, 1951, 178)

However, when Wally returned to Ireland he also returned to Galway and to full time writing. I had been playing in his *Home is the Hero*, one of the longest running plays ever in the Abbey. I remember playing Josie, the daughter. I left the Abbey to be married and my acting dwindled after that.

An undated paper cutting from 1952 **Picture 2.37**



On Macken, Ita's final memories are:

I hardly associate him with the Abbey at all. I just associate him with the Taibhdhearc I thought he was wonderful, really wonderful. That he was so tolerant of the lot of us there and that he was so easy going and that he made our

lives so enjoyable in a very pleasant way.... I just remember that they were very happy times.

## References:

- <sup>46</sup> Stafford, Seán. *Taibhdhearc na Gaillimhe, Galway's Gaelic Theatre*, a paper read to the Old Galway Society on the 8 March 2001.
- <sup>47</sup> BUW Folder 15
- <sup>48</sup> *The Irish Press*, 12 April 1948 and *The Irish Times*, 13 April 1948
- <sup>49</sup> McCormick Library of Special Collections, Northwestern University Library, 1970 Campus Drive, Evanston, IL 60208, USA
- <sup>50</sup> Correspondence with Sigrid Pohl, Northwestern University Library, 7 October 2008
- <sup>51</sup> BUW Folder 15
- <sup>52</sup> National Library of Ireland, O'Casey papers, MS. 38050
- <sup>53</sup> BUW Folder 15.
- <sup>54</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>55</sup> National Library of Ireland, O'Casey Papers, MS 38050
- <sup>56</sup> BUW Folder 64
- <sup>57</sup> Krause, David. ed. *The Letters of Sean O'Casey 1942-1954*, Volume II. New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc. 1980, page 94
- <sup>58</sup> The papers of Patricia Lynch and R. M. Fox, 1919-1972, correspondence with Macken (one letter from Macken to Fox dated 27/09/1947), MS collection list 79
- <sup>59</sup> *The Irish Press*, page 3; *The Irish Times*, page 2; *The Irish Independent*, page 2, for 12 February 1946
- <sup>60</sup> BUW, Folder 41
- <sup>61</sup> Macken, 2009, 193
- <sup>62</sup> Letter from Macmillan and Co. to Walter Macken dated 13 March 1947: Ultan Macken private papers
- <sup>63</sup> Original letter to Walter Macken: BUW, Folder 15
- <sup>64</sup> Ó Súilleabháin, Donncha. *An Cumann Scoil drámaíochta, 1934-1984*. Baile Átha Cliath: An Clóchomhar Tta, 1986
- <sup>65</sup> Ita O'Mahony's original letter of resignation, dated the 3 October 1947 can be found in the Taibhdhearc na Gaillimhe archive at James Hardiman Library, NUIG, T1/B/224

## Chapter 3

### Walter Macken and the Abbey Theatre

#### Background and earlier contacts

Following the early death of Fred Higgins, the Abbey's Managing Director, in January 1941 the Board appointed Ernest Blythe (Earnán de Blaghd) to the position. Hunt states:

For thirty years, ... Blythe was to control the theatre with firmness, much wisdom and little inspiration. Caution was his watchword and art declined – for caution untouched by the inspiration of the artist breeds mediocrity.

(1979, 166) (Footnote 3.1)

It was in Blythe's revivalist Irish language Abbey Theatre that Macken had his first play in English, *Mungo's Mansion*, accepted. The play was produced by his old mentor from the Taibhdhearc, Frank Dermody. (Page 72 and Footnotes 3.2)

Prior to this, as Bhaitéar Ó'Maicín, he brought his own play, *Oighreacht na Mara*, performed by the Taibhdhearc company, to the Abbey Theatre on the 27 May 1945 (Robinson, 1951, 200). (Page 62 and Footnote 3.3)

But before he put a foot on the Abbey stage Walter Macken had two articles published in *The Irish Press* on 24 & 31 January 1948, page 79. The first invited readers to 'try the theatre', while the second offered advice to would-be actresses.

**Footnote 3.1:** Earnest Blythe (1889-1975), a former member of the Gaelic League and the IRB, he was a supporter of the Anglo-Irish Treaty. Elected TD for North Monaghan in 1918, he served as Minister for Industry and Commerce. In 1923 he became Minister of Finance in the first Free State Government. He later served as Minister for Posts and Telegraphs and Vice-President of the Executive Council. Defeated in the 1933 election, he served in the Irish Senate until 1936 when he retired from politics. A Director of the Abbey Theatre, his appointment as Managing Director was 'passed unanimously' at the Abbey Board Meeting on 30 January 1941. The Board agreed on 5 June 1941 that he also become 'Permanent Chairman', with the Chair at Board meeting being taken by any other Director (NFC 98, Volume 9). He retired from the Board on 31 August 1967. He remained a director of the Abbey until 1972.

**Footnote 3.2:** The main producer at the Abbey for both English and Irish plays from 1939 to 1947 was Frank Dermody (Prionnsias Mac Diarmada). See also Footnote 1.1, page 21.

**Footnote 3.3:** *Oighreacht na Mara* was the forerunner of what became Macken's most successful novel *Rain on the Wind*, published in 1950. The play was a Taibhdhearc na Gaillimhe production.

## **Macken, the actor at the Abbey Theatre**

Ernest Blythe in December 1947 reported to the Abbey Board the approach he received from Macken for employment as an actor with the Abbey Company. He agreed to give him a trial and proposed that:

A good idea for trying him out here, might be to revive *Mungo's Mansion* with him in the name part and Harry Brogan playing Mowleogs as before.

(See page 68)

At the Board meeting on 22 January 1948 Blythe confirmed that '... Mr. Macken is here and will, next week, take the small part in the pantomime...' He went on to say that *Mungo's Mansion* could be 'got up in about ten days because the only big part to be filled is that of Mungo....'

The impression given is that Macken's arrival at the Abbey was on a needs basis and that in any parts that were offered to him he came under the same scrutiny of the manager and the Board like any other member of the company. His reputation in Galway counted for little and he was required to prove himself to the Abbey management and to the resident producers.

In the case of *Mungo's Mansion*, the Board agreed 'that Miss Mooney should try Walter Macken in the part of Mungo and decide if she considered him suitable for it.' (NFC 98, Volume 12)

On the 12 February the Abbey Board minutes record that the Comhar committee agreed to present the *Mary Rose* with Siobhan McKenna, if she was available. Blythe was able to tell the members that he had heard from Liam O Briain that her performance in the *Mary Rose* was excellent 'and by far the best thing ever done in the Taibhdhearc.'

Somewhat ironically, Walter Macken's first part as an Abbey actor (excepting his appearance in the pantomime) was in this production of *Máire Rós* (*Mary Rose*) by J. M.

Barrie. It was directed by Tomas Mac Anna and the translation used was the one by Siobhan McKenna (Footnote 3.4). This version had its first performance at Taibhdhearc na Gaillimhe in September 1942. Then it was directed by Macken and in it he also played the parts of Harry and Simon. This time he played An tOirminneach Amy.

Macken was now also preparing for a third part in *A Minute's Wait* (*Moill na Mithidí*) which opened on the 5 April. A testing work load for his introduction to the Abbey having satisfied Ria Mooney about the part of Mungo. It was reported to the Board at the 12 February meeting that:

Ria Mooney got Walter Macken to do a reading of the part of Mungo ... and she is satisfied that he will be good.

During March Macken approached Blythe about his play *Three Gaels in a Gantry* (Page 78) mentioning an interest from the Birmingham Repertory Company. The matter was raised at the Board meeting on the 11 March and the Board agreed

‘that Walter Macken be advised to let the Repertory Company produce the play.’

The *Márie Rós* was not a success. The Abbey minutes of 1 April 1948 ‘noted’, from the manager’s report, that Siobhan McKenna’s translation was not a success. ‘The translation itself was not first class ...’ and criticising the acting, Blythe said of Macken as Mr. Amy, that he ‘overacted and gave evidence of having been too long his own producer.’

**Footnote 3.4:** The translation of M. J. Barrie’s *Márie Rós* was by Siobhan McKenna (Siobhán Nic Chionnaith) who joined the Abbey from Taibhdhearc na Gaillimhe in 1944 where she worked under Macken. This is mentioned in the Abbey Papers (National Library of Ireland). MS. 23,299 states in a hand written summary that she ‘started acting in Taibhdhearc na Gaillimhe with Walter Macken in 1941’ while in MS. 23 056 the comment is as ‘under Walter Macken in Taibhdhearc na Gaillimhe in 1941’. Micheál Ó hAodha in *Siobhán: A Memoir of an Actress* wrote, ‘He [Liam Ó Briain, Professor of French at UCG] recommended her to the resident producer and leading actor, Walter (Wally) Macken’ (1994, 19). Siobhan played Nellie in the original Abbey production of *Mungo’s Mansion* in 1946, see Picture 2.31. Siobhan was the beneficiary of a scholarship scheme introduced by Blythe in 1942 for young actors from the Gaeltacht. MS. 23 059 contains a paper cutting from *The Irish Times*, ‘Portrait Gallery’ dated 18 December 1954 where Macken is quoted to have told her ‘She is essentially a tragedy actress’. Her translation of *Márie Rós* is in the National Library of Ireland, MS 21 300

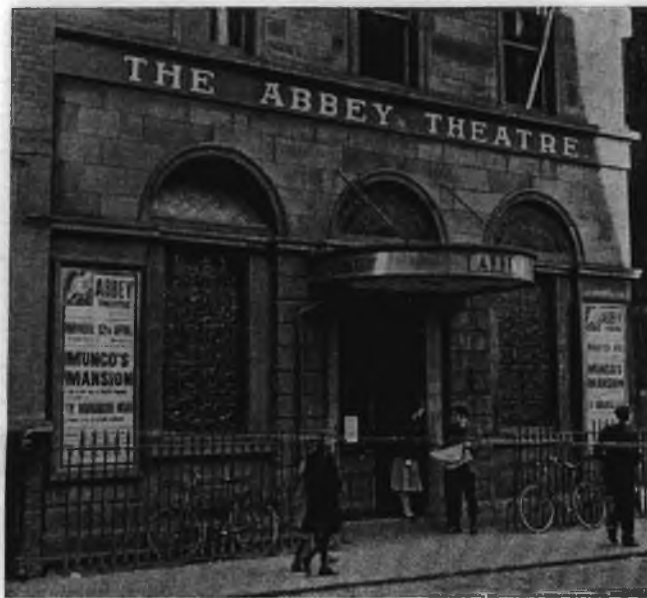


The same report confirmed that the revival of '*Mungo's Mansion*' is ready to go but it turns out to be very short.' Because of this the Directors agree that *The Workhouse Ward* by Lady Gregory should be included in the programme. *Mungo's Mansion* opened on the 12 April with Walter Macken playing the lead.

Tony Molloy in his 'Theatre' column in *The Irish Press* noted on the 12 April 1948, p 4

Wally Macken's *Mungo's Mansion* is revived by the Abbey ... 'Mungo' was a big success the last time; it won plaudits in London, too. This week the author will play Mungo, his first big role at the Abbey.

Picture 3.1



*The Irish Times* review the following day included the following comment:

.... This play, mainly farcical, as performed last night at the Abbey, gave good entertainment and Walter Macken for his good acting deserves praise.



By 22 April 1948 the Manager was able to report that '*Mungo's Mansion* did well in the first week but there will be a considerable loss this week... I think it really poor stuff and that we ought never to revive it again.'

Blythe considered it lost something by having Walter Macken playing Mungo in place of F. J. McCormick and admitted that even McCormick hardly succeeded in putting the character across.

Ria Mooney was less pessimistic about Macken and thought he would make a useful actor, 'though he needs toning down.'

In *A Minutes Wait* (*Moill na Mithidí*), Blythe thought Macken over played his part and 'lost some of the fun through not carrying conviction.' (NFC 98, Volume 12)

The opening paragraph of the Blythe manager's report for the fortnight ending 6 May 1948 comments on the *Mungo's Mansion* revival:

In accordance with the expectation indicated in the last report *Mungo's Mansion* did badly in its second week showing a loss of £98. It is, definitely, a play which is not worth keeping in the repertory as it does not bear seeing a second time.

Blythe papers ref: P24/ 747 (1)

Robinson in *Ireland's Abbey Theatre, A History, 1899 – 1951* shows that as Bhaitéar Ó'Maicín he played in most of the Abbey plays from March 1948 until his departure from the Abbey in 1950 (1951, 157).

His performances over this period were as:

Maurice: *The Lucky Finger* by Lennox Robinson, 23 August 1948

Bartley Dowd: *The King of Friday's Men* by M. J. Molloy, 18 October 1948

Owen: *The Grand House in the City* by Brinsley MacNamara, 7 February 1949

Circus Jack: *The Bugle in the Blood* by Bryan McMahon, 14 March 1949  
 Mr. Thurston: *All Souls' Night* by Joseph Tomelty, 16 April 1949  
 Sergeant: *The Rising of the Moon* by Lady Gregory, 18 April 1949  
 Musician: *The Dreaming of the Bones* by W. B. Yeats, 27 June 1949  
 Luke: *The Country Dressmaker* by George Fitzmaurice, 24 May, resumed 27 June 1949  
 Aeneas Murphy: *Ask for me To-morrow* by Ralph Kennedy, 3 October 1949  
 Ruictions McGowan: *Design for a Headstone* by Seamus Byrne, 8 April 1950  
 Black Anthony: *Mountain Flood* by Jack P. Cunningham, 10 August 1950

All were produced by Ria Mooney, the Abbey's resident producer.

In 1940 Ernest Blythe, in line with his policy on the production of plays in the Irish language, changed the name of the Abbey Theatre to Amharclann na Mainistreach (Hunt, 1979, 167). He further demanded that all Abbey actors be proficient in both the English and Irish languages.

As an Irish-language speaker, Bhaitéar Ó'Maicín complied easily with this requirement and appeared in most of the Amharclann Irish language plays during 1948, 1949 and 1950 (Robinson, 1951, 203). His parts in the Irish plays were as:

An tOirminneach Amy: *Marie Rós* le J. M. Barrie, 15 March 1948 \*  
 Domhnall O'Muimhneachain: *Moill na Mithidi* le Martin McHugh, 5 April 1948 \*  
 Na Ruisigh (with 5 others): *Brian agus an Claidheamh Soluis*, 27 December 1948  
 Estaban: *Bean an Mhi-Ghra* le Jacinto Benavente, 31 October 1949 \*  
 Balor: *Niall agus Carmelita*, 26 December 1949 (**Footnote 3.5**)  
 Gairbheanal: *Tristan agus Isialt*, le Joseph Bedier agus Louis Artus, 22 May 1950 \*  
 Niall: *Clocha na Coigchrice* le Aindreas O Callchobhair, 15 October 1950

\* (see **Footnote 3.6**)

**Footnote3.5:** Brian agus an Claidheamh Soluis, and Niall agus Carmelita were the Abbey Christmas shows for children.

**Footnote3.6:** For the names of the translators' of the non-Irish plays refer to Robinson (1951, 203).

The Leiritheoir (Producer) for the Irish-language plays was Tomas Mac Anna. The casts and play titles are as published in the Robinson history (without the required accents). Extracts from the national newspaper reviews of these plays are in **Appendix 3.1**.

Overall, Walter Macken's performances were well received.

*The Irish Press* described his performance as 'excellent' in *The Lucky Finger*. While Blythe in his report of 26 August mentioned 'Walter Macken as Mosey did the best work he has done here yet.'

Macken established his national reputation as an actor with his performances as Bartley Dowd in *The King of Friday's Men* (**Footnote 3.7**). When in rehearsal Blythe was of the opinion that he '...will do very well as Bartley Dowd' and by 14 October reported that he '...is certainly getting his feet as an actor, under Miss Mooney's direction, and appears to be doing a lovely bit of work.' Into the run, the Abbey minutes of 28 October record *The King of Friday's Men* an 'outstanding success'. Macken's performance was described a 'splendid' and proved '... as we have felt for a little while' that the faults with his acting were due to his years in the Taibhdhearc

...taking leading roles, producing himself, burdened all the time with the consciousness that his company was weak and that if he did not put the play across by his own efforts it would flop.

Hunt writing about Macken and *The King of Friday's Men* in his book on the Abbey Theatre suggests:

Walter Macken made his greatest success as an actor in the part of the battered shillelagh fighter, a part he played later in the short-lived Broadway production. (1979, 171)

**Footnote 3.7:** Ernest Blythe in his report for the year ending dated 30 June 1948 lists the plays done and the outcomes. Among them was *The King of Friday's Men* '....which marks Molloy out as the best dramatist who has come to the Abbey in many years.' (P24/ 716)

Macken received what must be considered as 'rave' reviews from the national daily papers for his performance in *The King of Friday's Men*. *The Irish Times* reviewer wrote:

.... From the acting viewpoint, the play is almost exclusively Walter Macken. To the part of Bartley Dowd, Mr. Macken brings a rich knowledge of the locale of the play, a good physique, and, above all a voice sensitively tuned to bring out every cadence of some of the loveliest lines written in the Irish theatre since the death of Synge.

These qualities combine to give Mr. Macken's performance a satisfying wholeness such as has not been seen since Cusack's *Playboy* in a part of the kind.

*The Irish Independent* reported 'This actor [Macken] has never been seen to such advantage on the Dublin stage ...' while *The Irish Press*, paragraph 4, leads with 'Macken Brilliant' and goes on to say: 'The difficult lead was handled in brilliant poise by Wally Macken ...'

T. C. Murray in his correspondence with Mathew O'Mahony<sup>66</sup> gives us another view of activity at the Abbey Theatre over this period. In the O'Mahony papers, folder for 1948, Murray writes in his letter to O'Mahony, dated 26.IX.48:

The Abbey, I understand is on the crest of the wave – that is financially. All through the season it has been booked out night after night – the fruit of the invasion from cross channel.

In the folder for 1949 – 1950 in his letter dated 23.III.50 Murray comments on *The King of Friday's Men*:

I haven't been to a show for an age. The last one I saw was Molloy's *King of Friday's Men*. It didn't appeal to me somehow. I've grown [tired in] Anglo-Irish writing of that 'big bad wolf' the cruel landlord and his agent and the innocent

peasant girl who becomes a prey to the lustful tyrant of the big house. However, most people liked the play immensely and that's what really matters.

[ ] The writing is unclear.

And in the midst of all this activity in 1948 Macken's latest play, *The Boys Come Home*, submitted to the Abbey, was rejected by the reading committee and the Board decision on the 30 September was to return the manuscript to the author.

The following year, on 5 October 1949, Michael J. Molloy wrote to Walter Macken and raised the question of his playing Bartley Dowd in an American production of *The King of Friday's Men*.

His first performance in 1949 was in *The Grand House in the City*. *The Irish Times* reviewer reported the part of Owen giving Macken '... a good opportunity for an energetic colourful character study.' Blythe's view was that Macken's performance 'as Owen Lynam, the grabber, is excellent.' (P24/ 748/ 1)

In March, *The Irish Times* also thought that Macken for his performance as 'Circus Jack' in *The Bugle in the Blood* '... kindled a new flame of hope for the survival of Abbey acting ...' The Abbey Board minutes record that '...as the strong man [Macken] is creating a lovely part.'

The Easter Monday 1949 plays, to celebrate the declaration of the Republic, included Lady Gregory's *The Rising of the Moon*, with Macken playing the sergeant, directed by M. J. Dolan. The Abbey minute books records:

The Rising of the Moon was better done than we have seen it for many years. Walter Macken was inclined possibly to get just a shade too much comedy out of it, but it is certain that when we produce it again he will make a nearly ideal sergeant. (P24/ 748/ 4)

Macken is mentioned in three of the reports for his part in *The Country Dressmaker*. On the 5 May 1949 Blythe remarked on the casting, 'Walter Macken will be definitely better as Luke Quilter than [a previous Abbey player] ...' (P24/ 748/ 5), and in his next report, dated 19 May, he wrote 'I shall be surprised if Walter Macken does not prove immensely popular as Luke Quilter, the matchmaker (748/ 6). In the report on the play, dated the 23 June, we read, 'Walter Macken as Luke Quilter altogether out-shone the [previous] performance given by ...' and he goes on to note Macken as a substitute for one of the musicians in *The Dreaming of the Bones* (P24/ 748/ 7). *The Irish Press* enjoyed the '... pleasing lightness...' of *The Country Dressmaker* and reported Macken as the matchmaker dominating the '... entire action.'

*The Press* also liked his 'easiness' in *All Souls' Night*, while *The Irish Times* remarked on his '... richly comic performance' in *Ask for me To-morrow*. *The Irish Independent*, reporting on the same play, thought he brought '... his rich and vigorous personality...' to his part.

Interestingly in the Manager's report of the 3 May 1949 Macken is mentioned under the heading 'Supernumerary Players'. This heading in the Manager's report first appeared in the minutes on the 21 April 1949.

Others who, I think, should certainly be kept are Walter Macken, who has in him the making of an excellently good actor...

This position was also repeated in his report to the Board on the 19 May 1949 under the same heading and the decision was that 'The Board agreed that Walter Macken' and other named players 'should be kept...'

The control exercised by the Manager can also be better understood when we consider the material in the Blythe reports to the Board. Blythe had poor opinions of some of the Abbey players and at times was pointed in his criticism of both performances and direction. He also extended his control into their private lives.

I gave Walter Macken and Rita Foran permission to play in *The King of Friday's Men* for a week in Cork in June. Walter Macken has got a cottage at Crosshaven and is taking his family down and can get in and out of Cork to play and do some rehearsals in advance. (P24/ 748/ 6)

In the report of 21 October 1949 Blythe mentions Macken doing a part in *The Jailbird*, a part previously performed by F. J. McCormick (P24/ 748/ 11):

*The Jailbird: The Jailbird* has been ready for some time; but rehearsals were stopped to prevent the players getting stale. I think a good performance will be given. Of course Walter Macken and Maire Ni Chathain in the two leading parts, the Jailbird and the Dressmaker, will be a good deal different from F. J. McCormick and Eileen Crowe. As a change had to be made, it was perhaps as well that there should be the new people in both parts....

Blythe was referring to the first production of *The Jailbird* by George Shiels at the Abbey on 12 October 1936 with McCormick as the Jailbird, (Robinson, 1951, 163). The 1949 production is not mentioned in the Robinson history. Lennox Robinson did not include revivals in his lists.

The report also mentions *La Malquerida*, performed with a Comhar subsidy and a 'good cast' (2 October).

I expect *The Jailbird* will run for three weeks or so. It is proposed to break for three days beginning 31<sup>st</sup> October and perform the Irish version of *La Malquerida*. It might be that that play, which is very good, would run for a week, like MacLiammoir's *Diarmuid agus Grainne*....



The 2 November report (748/ 12) describes Macken as doing the Jailbird ‘excellently’. The same report records that Macken as the step-father in *La Marquerida* (*Bean an Mhi-Ghra*) on the 31 October 1949, ‘...did a very sympathetic and restrained piece of work’.

*The Jailbird* proved a disappointment. After a good first week attendances were poor in week two and Blythe speculated that

Perhaps the new cast was not as good as the cast that played previously. I confess, personally, that after seeing Walter Macken a couple of times I felt that he was no adequate substitute for McCormick who previously played the Jailbird.

(16 November 1949)

Lady Gregory’s *The Rising of the Moon* with Macken’s playing the sergeant was performed twice by the Abbey in 1950. In February it preceded *The Countess Cathleen*. It was described by Blythe as ‘not good’ and ‘...merely repeated the last production given on Easter Monday last year. Walter Macken is good in some ways as the sergeant and would be really good with proper direction.’ (22 February 1950 and P24/ 749/ 3)

The Director was Michael J. Dolan for both productions.

Blythe, as was normal practice, reported to the Board on plays through their preparation stages to the public performance and on the 5 April 1950 he offered his opinion on *Design for a Headstone* by Seamus Byrne (Footnote 3.8).

**Footnote 3.8:** Séamus Byrne, 1904-1968. Born in Dublin, Byrne studied law in UCD. He was imprisoned in 1940 for radio transmissions for the IRA. His plays include *Design for a Headstone*, on the subject of a hunger strike, and fore-runner of *The Quare Fellow* (Hogan, 1968, 256), *Little City*, rejected by the Abbey for an abortion theme but played at Dublin Theatre Festival in 1964 and *Innocent Bystander* which paints a picture of declining moral standards in personal and business life. His central character, determined to restore the family fortunes, aligns himself with a corrupt local politician and this alliance has disastrous consequences. Micheál Ó hAodha has a chapter in *Plays and Places* (1961, 39) on *Design for a Headstone*.

This was a play that gave the company many problems. Described by Blythe as ‘a difficult play to produce’ on 8 March, it required much cutting, a name change, additional lines, extra rehearsals and, being set in a prison, appropriate props and uniforms (provided from Mountjoy Gaol). On 5 April Blythe informed the Directors that ‘.... My own feeling is that it will be good and that it ought to be popular. Walter Macken as Ructions McGowan is doing really excellent work.’ (749/ 6)

*Design for a Headstone* proved to be also somewhat controversial attracting unwanted and unsought attention from the IRA and the ultra-right wing Catholic organisation, *Maria Duce* (Footnote 3.9).

According to Blythe this controversy had a positive effect on audience size:

.... There were fair audiences during the first week but booking for the second week was very slack indeed. The dust-up arranged by the *Maria Duce* idiots on the Friday night, however, gave an immediate stimulus to the bookings and the second week audiences were fairly large.... (P24/ 749/ 7, 3 May 1950)

‘The dust-up’ referred to by Blythe attracted little attention from the press (Footnote 3.10). *The Irish Times* front page on 17 April reported under the heading

Abbey Play Proceeds Undisturbed

Crowds coming to the Abbey Theatre on Saturday night in search of excitement were disappointed.... The play... which had caused protest on religious and

**Footnote 3.9:** *Maria Duce*: A small right wing Roman Catholic lobby group in Ireland from the 1930s to 1950s that among other things campaigned to get Eamon de Valera to make Roman Catholicism the established church in his 1937 *Bunreacht na hÉireann* (Constitution). For a fuller description see Keogh (1980, 163) (Source: [http://www.irelandinformationguide.com/Maria\\_Duce](http://www.irelandinformationguide.com/Maria_Duce))

**Footnote 3.10:** O’Casey in a letter to Frank McCarthy (later General Secretary of the Christian Socialist Movement in the UK) dated the 20 April 1950 wrote ‘There’s been another Row in the Abbey over a play called “Design for a Headstone.” A mad religious patch of persons & a bunch of old IRA yelled & protested. Some tried to pull the clothes off the author in the Foyer, the C. Guards came, & there was a fine old packing match. I haven’t read about it, but a letter from Dublin tells me of it.’<sup>67</sup>

political grounds during the show the previous night was accepted without disturbance by a full house.

The Manager was happy to report on 17 May that *Design for a Headstone* had a good final week thanks to the *Maria Duce* affair.

In July, Michael Dolan was leaving the cast of *Shadow of a Gunman* and Walter Macken was asked to stand-in at short notice.

I wired Walter Macken to be sure to be back on Saturday morning and sent him the script of the small part of Mr. Gallogher to study during the few remaining days he was in Donegal. He rehearsed on Saturday and again on Monday and was able to do the part quite alright on Monday night, though he is not as good as Mr. Dolan.

(Manager's report, 12 July 1950)

That Macken was prepared to agree to this request at such short notice may not be all that surprising in hindsight when we consider that he, from the late spring of 1950, may well have been preoccupied, as we will see later, with a possible Broadway appearance as Bartley Dowd in Molloy's *The King of Friday's Men*.

The proposal to bring *The King of Friday's Men* to Broadway was known to Blythe or at least he knew something of the arrangement and at 9 August Board meeting Blythe reported:

Walter Macken will not be going to New York at any rate until the middle of September. He got a wire a week or ten days ago postponing the suggested date of departure from 15 August until 10 September. He then wired back stating that, in view of his commitments in the theatre he could not go until after the 10 September. That means that he will be available for the special programme of three short plays which we shall do for the Inter-Parliamentary Union on 8 September.

His Manager's report of the 23 August 1950 confirms a wider Abbey involvement in the Broadway proposal. Blythe sought and secured permission for Ria Mooney to be part of the Broadway production arrangements.

I wrote the Directors about the proposal that Miss Mooney be allowed to go to New York in December to assist in the Broadway production of *The King of Friday's Men*. I was afterwards in touch with two members of the Board, who agreed to the proposal. Consequently, I gave Miss Mooney permission to accept the offer. Walter Macken will not be going to America till Miss Mooney crosses.

(P24/ 749/ 8)

Whatever the arrangement was is not clear and in a brief comment Blythe, in his report on the 18 October, confirmed to the Directors that: 'Miss Mooney now seems not to be going to New York for the *The King of Friday's Men*....' (749/ 11)

Also, in the minutes of the 9 August there is a puzzling reference made by Blythe to a new Macken play.

Walter Macken handed me the other day a new play to be read by myself alone. I take it that because we have rejected at least two plays of his since *Mungo's Mansion* was accepted he does not want formally to offer us another unless he thinks it has a reasonable chance of being accepted. If any of the Directors would read the present script, so that I may give my account to Walter with some fortification, I should be obliged.

Mr. ÓFarachain agreed to read the play.

No mention is made of the title of the play and there are no further references to this play in the Abbey minute book. The next Macken play to be submitted to the Abbey Theatre was in June 1952.

His final full-length English language play as an Abbey actor was *Mountain Flood* by Jack P. Cunningham in August 1950. *Mountain Flood* was the winning play in the Abbey play competition that year. The result was formally announced to the Abbey Board on the 7 June and the Board decided that the play would start rehearsal when the company re-assembled after the summer break. A cast for the play was ‘passed’ at the meeting.

The play opened on the 10 August. The reviews were on the 11 August and the play was not well received<sup>68</sup>. *The Irish Independent*, reported ‘Walter Macken, as he always does, brings force and meaning to the stage ...’ *The Irish Press*, while mentioning ‘.... a great deal of over playing, when the material cried out for restraint ...’ said that Macken ‘carried the brunt of the acting among the men...’ *The Irish Times* was not impressed. Its reviewer did not like the play.

To discuss the quality of the acting in the circumstances, hardly would be fair. Walter Macken, ... probably made the best of a bad job, and, if there was a little ranting and roaring, they can be forgiven on the grounds that they had to get a little life into it somehow.

Blythe’s view on Macken’s last play at the Abbey may reflect the criticism the play received from the critics.

.... as far as I could see [the play] was well acted by the Company. Generally speaking it met with hostile criticism. Some of this was undeserved because it was inspired by the view that no play should be out on the boards here, particularly during the tourist season, unless it goes powerfully to show that all our people everywhere are neat and clean and civilised. It was this view of things (in addition to the fact that his son failed to get employment here a few years ago) which caused Senator Tunney to wish that the Abbey would burn down....

(P24/ 749/ 8, 23 August 1950)

In September a special performance was done for the Inter-Parliamentary Union. The plays performed for this occasion were: *In the Shadow of the Glen*, *The Rising of the Moon* and *Cathleen Ni Houlihan*. Blythe reported on the preparation and the preliminary performances in his reports of 6 September and at the meeting on the 4 October he reported on the special performance for those attending the Inter-Parliamentary Union meeting. .

*In the Shadow of the Glen* [sic] was given a preliminary run after *Friends and Relations* on Saturday night and Monday night. *Cathleen Ni Houlihan* was played last night and will be played again tonight. In *In the Shadow of the Glen* I thought Brid Lynch excellent and the men were reasonably good except that Walter Macken tends to shout a bit too much. (P24/ 749/ 9)

The special performance for the Inter-Parliamentary Union was given quite successfully on Saturday 9 Sept. I do not think, personally, that Walter Macken got under the skin of his roles, either as the Sergeant in *The Rising of the Moon* or that of the Old Man in *In the Shadow of the Glen* [sic]. (749/ 10)

The reviews and, indeed, any reports on the performances of the Irish language plays presented by the Abbey over these years (1948 to 1950) are, at best, 'hit and miss' affairs. All the plays were listed in the papers' theatre column but many receive no further attention. This has resulted in a less than complete account on the productions and performances. This lack of reporting may say more about the Irish language skills of the reviewers and/ or the perceived interest that the papers or their readers had in these productions.

*The Irish Times* 'liked' Macken in the March 1948 production of J. M. Barrie's *Marie Ros* while *The Irish Press*, wrote that Macken among others 'excelled'. In *Bean an Mhi-Ghra*, October 1949, *The Irish Press* thought Macken '...smouldered nicely between brooding and flaring,' with *The Irish Independent* reporting that 'Bhaitear O Maicin plays the complex character of the stepfather with restraint.' *The Irish Press* reporting on

*Tristan agus Isialt* in May 1950, mentioned ‘....The large cast received an enthusiastic ovation for a performance which started shakily enough but which acquired a high degree of confidence later in the play....’ and *The Irish Independent* reported no ‘weak link’ in the cast.

Other performances by Walter Macken during his time with the Abbey included that with The Lyric Theatre Company that performed at the Abbey Theatre from time to time in the 1940s’. In 1949, Walter Macken played Conchubar, in *Deirdre* with them by courtesy of the Abbey Theatre. (Footnote 3.11)

Two plays were presented on the Sundays 15 and 22 May 1949. The programme consisted of:

- *The Linnaun Shee* by George Fitzmaurice
- A poetry section
- *Deirdre* by W. B. Yeats

The producers were Shelah Richards and Sybil le Brocqy

*The Irish Press* reviewer on the 16 May 1949, page 5, stated ‘*Deirdre* is a thing of austerity ....’ And describing Macken’s performance wrote that

... there was a barbaric splendour about Walter Macken’s make-up as Conchubar. His acting was resonant with an undertow of sorrow that brought one into sympathy with the aged king. (TM)

**Footnote 3.11:** The programme for this presentation can be found in The National Library of Ireland, Abbey archives, Box 1936-1949. The Lyric Theatre Company is described in a flyer promoting the *The Countess Cathleen* by W. B. Yeats, in a double bill with Austin Clarke’s free adaptation of the *Kiss* by Théodore de Banville that played at the Abbey Theatre on the 4 & 5 June 1944 as:

‘Under the guidance of the distinguished poet, Austin Clarke, a group of Actors and Verse Speakers has been brought to an excellence which revives memories of the days, when the fame of her Verse Drama carried Ireland’s name across the world.’

The directors of the Lyric Theatre Company are listed in *The Countess Cathleen* play programme as: Austin Clarke, Ria Mooney and Riobeárd Ó Faracháin.



*The Irish Times* review by ‘K’ also on 16 May, page 5, described *Deirdre* as: ‘uneasy at times, but had moments when it climbed near the high places of tragic beauty.’

On Macken, the reviewer wrote:

.... Mr Macken used his rich baritone to fine effect in his early speeches, but overplayed, in my opinion, towards the close, and threw away Conchubar’s dignity and querulous senile fretfulness....

Both plays are commented on in the Abbey minute book:

The performance of both plays was such that if they had been done by the Abbey Company the newspaper people would have found no criticism too hard for us.

(19 May 1949)

In May 1950 Macken received a letter from Peter White (Macken, 2009, 251) proposing an American production of Molloy’s play and on Molloy’s recommendation offering him the part of Bartley Dowd. The letter suggested ‘... an early Fall production’. Macken accepted this offer. (Appendix 3.2 <sup>69</sup>)

Macken’s negotiations with White, who at that time represented ‘The King of Friday’s Men Company’ and its sole owner, Michael P. Grace II, continued through the summer. Rehearsals were to start in August 1950 (letter dated 14 July 1950 from Macmillan’s and quoted in full in *Dreams on Paper*, 2009, 255). There were further postponements and in a letter from Michael P. Grace II dated 13 October the opening for the play was to be in ‘... the latter part of December here in New York’ <sup>70</sup>.

Molloy wrote to Macken on 20 October 1950 suggesting rehearsals were to start in mid-November.

It was at this time that Macken decided to leave the Abbey Theatre Company. His letter of resignation, dated the 27 October 1950, to Ernest Blythe mentioned his trip to America.

Picture 3.2 is an excerpt from the resignation letter.

Táim ag machnamh ar an sgeal le fada, agus ar mhi-shástacht an caoi ina bhfuilimid i ngeall ar an turas go Merioca, agus se mo thuairim nach bhfuil ach bealach amháin sasuil as agus se sin go neireochainn as mo phost mar aisteoir sa Mainistir.

Da bhrígh sin cuirim chugat le seo fogra faoi. Seo é an uair is fearr mar nach bhfuilim pairteach i ndráma ar bith i lathair na huaire, is ní raibh le deanai, agus níl páirteach i gcleachtuighthe agus ní gheirtochaídh m'inteachtá an amharclann nó an gcomhlacht.

The three letters in this correspondence with Earnan De Blaghd are reproduced in Appendix 3.3.

By this time Blythe was well aware of what was happening. The uncertainty about a date for the start of rehearsals for the Broadway production would have been unsettling for Macken and made it less easy for Blythe to offer Macken appropriate parts at the Abbey. The only way to resolve the dilemma was for Macken to resign from the company. His letter of resignation is dated the 27 October 1950 and Blythe's letter of the same date confirms this and accepts his resignation. It is possible that Macken delivered his letter of resignation to Blythe in his office considering the reply has the same date. Of significance in Blythe's acceptance letter is his offer to Macken to return to the Abbey Company when he becomes free to do so.

Picture 3.3

beidh faillte romhat nuair a bheas tu saor chun teacht thar n-ais go dtí an fhoireann.

Ernest Blythe informed the Abbey Directors of Macken's departure on the 1 November 1950.

Picture 3.4 is a copy of this from his report (P24/ 749/ 12).

WALTER MACKEN goes off the pay roll this week. I told him last week that I should like to know exactly when he would be going to America as there would be a part for him in PROFESSOR TIM if he would be here for some time but that, in case of uncertainty, it could not be given to him. He retorted by saying that he thought that in the circumstances it would be best for him to retire from the Company. I do not know whether or not he was by way of taking offence at my query. In any case I told him that he would be welcome back after the American trip but that of course we could not keep him idle on the pay roll for a considerable time awaiting the convenience of the people in America. He was quite friendly to me in conversation but seems to have gone round the place afterwards saying good-bye to the players and simply telling them he had resigned. A notice to the effect that he had resigned appeared on the Sunday Press. The other papers, however, rang me up and in each case I said he was leaving because he had been offered the part of Bartley Dowd in America and that he was expected back after the American production. Consequently they described his resignation as temporary. It is difficult to know whether or not he will actually be with us again. His inclination would be, if financially possible, to give all his energy to writing. He wants to go to America less for the sake of being in THE KING OF FRIDAY'S MEN in New York than for the opportunity of making contacts with American publishers.

Walter Macken was not to return to the Abbey until 1965. The Abbey Theatre structures had by then been reorganised and the changes made to its Articles of Association allowed for the appointment of 25 shareholders. The number of Abbey Board members was also increased from 4 to 5 allowing for the appointment of a second Government nominee to the Board. Macken was offered the second Government position. Within a short period of time he became artistic adviser and assistant manager with the understanding that he was

to succeed Ernest Blythe as manager. The establishment of the position artistic adviser foresaw the establishment of the position of artistic director in 1969 (Hunt, 1979, 207). 1965 was the final year of the Abbey Theatre's 15 year exile at the Queen's Theatre, Dublin. The new Abbey Theatre, being built on the site of the Theatre destroyed in 1951, was expected to open in 1966.

**Reference:**

- <sup>66</sup> Mathew O'Mahony papers, National Library of Ireland, MS 24,900, 8 folders, 1931 - 1960
- <sup>67</sup> Krause, David. ed. *The Letters of Sean O'Casey 1942-1954*, Volume II. New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc. 1980 (Page 706)
- <sup>68</sup> *The Irish Independent*, 11 August 1950, page 8; *The Irish Press*, 11 August 1950, page 7; *The Irish Times*, 11 August 1950, page 5
- <sup>69</sup> **Appendix 3.2** is a copy of the original letter from Ultan Macken's personal files. The letter is also quoted in *Dreams on Paper*, page 251
- <sup>70</sup> This whole episode is covered in *Dreams on Paper*, 2009, from page 251.

## Chapter 4

### The years after the Abbey

On the 5 October 1949 Michael J. Molloy wrote to Walter Macken and raised the question of him playing Bartley Dowd in an American production of his play, *The King of Friday's Men*. (Macken, 2009, 251)

The following May Macken received a letter from Peter White (**Appendix 3.2**) proposing an American production of Molloy's play and on Molloy's recommendation offering him the part of Bartley Dowd. The letter suggested '... an early Fall production'.

A letter of offer from 'The King of Friday's Men Company', signed by Peter White, and dated 22 June, followed. It would appear that Macken accepted the offer and this is confirmed in a further letter dated 11 July. This letter thanked Macken for his reply dated 26 June and stated '....We are delighted you have decided to come with us....' (Macken, 2009, 254)

In parallel with this offer, Macken continued his work at the Abbey Theatre. He appeared as Ruitions McGowan in *Design for a Headstone* in April and in the Irish-language version of *Tristan and Isolde* in May. His final performance in a full-length at the Abbey Theatre was as Black Anthony in *Mountain Flood* in August 1950. The details of these performances are in Chapter 3 and **Appendix 3.1**.

The correspondence with White, who represented 'The King of Friday's Men Company' and its sole owner, Michael P. Grace II, continued throughout the summer of 1950 and into the autumn. Rehearsals were to start in August 1950 (see Chapter 3). There were further postponements and in a letter from Michael P. Grace II dated 13 October the opening for the play was to be in '...the latter part of December here in New York'.

M. J. Molloy wrote to Macken on 20 October 1950 suggesting rehearsals were to start in mid-November. The letter mentioned that Peter White had been sacked and that there were other internal problems facing the production (Macken, 2009, 266).

It was at this time that Macken resigned his position with the Abbey. His resignation from the Abbey Theatre company has been described in Chapter 3 and **Appendix 3.3**.

From the time of the first letter from Peter White in May 1950 and until April 1951, a period of just under one year, Walter Macken was to experience great success, unfortunately, tempered with a major disappointment.

The final version of his novel, *Rain on the Wind*, was accepted for publication by Macmillan and Company early in 1950. Agreement for its publication in the USA was confirmed in July. In August, *Rain on the Wind* was chosen by *The Daily Graphic* in the UK as the 'Book Find for September' and the book's success was further guaranteed in the UK with the decision of the *Reprint Society* in November to select it as their 'book of the month' for a month in 1952. The Society distributed a book a month to its 170,000 readers. By December the book's success was guaranteed in the USA when it was chosen as a monthly choice by the *Literary Guild in America*. This guaranteed sales of 200,000 copies (Macken, 2009, 273).

Finally, after rehearsals during January 1951, *The King of Friday's Men* opened its pre-Broadway run in Boston at the Plymouth Theatre and, it was reported, moved from there to New Haven and Rhode Island before opening at the Playhouse Theatre in New York on 21 February 1951.

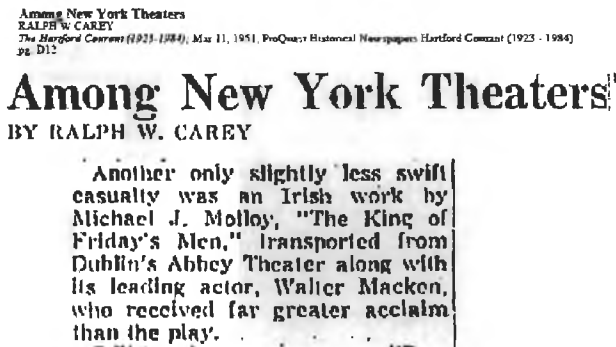
The Directors of the Abbey Theatre at their meeting on 21 February 1951 'Noted' the following from the Manager's report:

Reports from Boston indicate that Walter Macken has made a very good impression as Bartley Dowd in *The King of Friday's Men*. It is suggested that Hollywood offers are likely to be made to him. In any case his last book is doing

very well and between one thing and another I fancy we are not likely to have him back. On the whole, I think we need not regret that, as although he is an excellent actor in parts which suit him, his range is limited ...

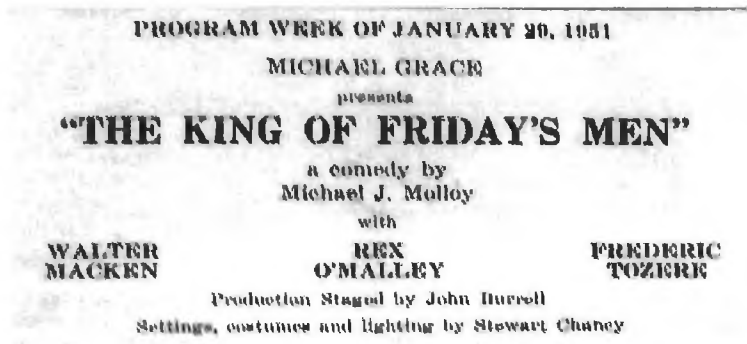
My inquiries to identify the New Haven performances were unsuccessful. The Shubert Theatre would have been an obvious venue but its list of plays performed during the season 1950-1951 makes no mention of *The King of Friday's Men*. Perhaps it played at a smaller venue. A search of the local newspapers for New Haven and the surrounding area show only a mention of the play in the *Hartford Courant* on the 11 March 1951.

Picture 4.1



Casting would appear to have been a major problem for the company and there were changes made to the cast after the pre-runs for the Broadway production. **Picture 4.2(a)** and (b) are from the pre-run promotion and cast pages copied from the Plymouth Theatre, Boston programme.<sup>71</sup>

Picture 4.2 (a)





**Picture 4.2 (b)**

C A S T	
(In the order of their appearance)	
GAISCEEN, gamekeeper to Caesar French .....	REX O'MALLEY
UNA BREHONY, his niece .....	MAGGIE McNAMARA
OWEN FENNIGAN, betrothed to Una .....	KENN MILESTON
MAURA PENDER, tallywoman to Caesar French .....	NORMA CRANE
BOORLA, Caesar's bailiff .....	TUDOR OWEN
BARTLEY DOWD, a man from Tyrawly .....	WALTER MACKEN
KITTY, a peasant girl .....	PEGGY McCAY
RORY COMMONS .....	ELLIOTT SULLIVAN
BIDDY, Caesar's housekeeper .....	GRANIA O'MALLEY
MURTY, a stable hand .....	JOHN DREW DEVEREAUX
CAESAR FRENCH .....	FREDERIC TOZERE

The bare statistics for *The King of Friday's Men* Broadway run, copied from the Internet Broadway Data Base, read as follows and include the Broadway cast: <sup>72</sup>

Playhouse Theatre, (2/21/1951 - 2/24/1951)  
 Preview: Total Previews:  
 Opening: Feb 21, 1951  
 Closing: Feb 24, 1951 Total Performances: 4

Opening Night Production Credits:  
 Produced by Michael Grace  
 Written by Michael J. Molloy  
 Scenic Design by Stewart Chaney;  
 Costume Design by Stewart Chaney;  
 Lighting Design by Stewart Chaney  
 Stage Manager: Windsor Lewis

Opening Night Cast:	
John Drew Devereaux	Murty
Walter Macken	Bartley Dowd
<b>Ian Martin</b>	Gaisceen
Peggy McCay	Kitty
<b>Sean McClory</b>	Rory Commons
<b>Mac McLeod</b>	Owen Fennigan
Maggie McNamara	Una Brehony
Grania O'Malley	Biddy
Tudor Owen	Boorla
Frederic Tozere	Caesar French
<b>Janet Ward</b>	Maura Pender

The director, John Burrell, see **Picture 4.2 (a)** is missing from this list.

The cast changes are highlighted and show that there were four changes to the cast between the pre-run season and the opening night.

Perhaps cast changes were common place in such productions at the time but, if so, replacing four cast members over such a short period of time could not have contributed to consistent or credible performances. From **Footnote 6.3**, written in the context of Sean McClory's time as an actor at Taibhdhearc na Gaillimhe, the indications are that McClory only played in three of the Broadway performances.

The run was terminated by Michael Grace on the 23 February 1951, **Appendix 4.1**.

Hogan refers to *The King of Friday's Men* as Molloy's best play and comments that the New York production

... despite Walter Macken's repeating his Abbey role of Bartley Dowd, it was a poor production that lasted only four performances. (1969, 89)

The American 'adventure' from a theatrical view point was a disappointing failure that may have been somewhat overshadowed by the success of his novel *Rain on the Wind* in America and England.

Peggy Macken in her *Cursai* interview in 1988 was asked for her memory of this visit to America.

#### Picture 4.3

Who was in the play with Daddy? Anybody we would know well?

Well, there was Fred Tesair, who still does comedy and many others. We did tours and it eventually came to N.Y. We got a great reception in Boston. He got a great crit. everywhere even in N.Y.. The others didn't because they didn't really understand the play. A newspaper man from Boston asked him how long he thought the play would last, and he said four or five nights. He knew it wasn't great but it was a great personal success for him. Later, we met one of the newspaper men in N.Y. and they said 'Mr. Macken you were a little bit out - it ran one night less than Daddy said.'

Transcript tape 2, page 6 from the Tom Kenny collection

The question of employment offers from Hollywood studios was also discussed in that interview. It would appear that Macken did receive some good offers but none of them were sufficient to attract him from his intention to live in Ireland and to write.

#### Picture 4.4

Did they offer him a contract?

Yes, I presume they did because they wanted us to go to Hollywood. One of them said to me we'll get you a big house and we'll bring out the two boys, and they offered us plenty of money for those days. I said whatever Walter decided to do would be fine with me. I really thought he would take it when he was offered such an enormous sum of money. He said he had to go home and finish a book. They kept saying 'you can do the book here, we'll get you a secretary'. They gave him a Resume of the first film and he said he would think about it, but he said that they were all the same.

Did other theatre people offer him work?

I don't know, because he got so many different offers. He was very sensible. He knew he just wanted to go home. He wanted to write, he had started the 'bogman' and wanted to finish it. Then he decided he would come home and buy a car and a house in Connemara.

Transcript tape 2, page 7 from the Tom Kenny collection

Walter and Peggy Macken returned to Galway in April 1951. The success of *Rain on the Wind* ensured a level of financial stability and security that allowed the family to buy a house in Oughterard, Co. Galway, on the banks of Loch Corrib. It was also certain that Macken was not to return to the Abbey Theatre.

#### Picture 4.5

He was'nt going back to the Abbey?

No. He left the Abbey, he got enough of that. When we came home, he bought a green prefect in Dublin. We still had granny Macken in Dublin. We saw this house advertised in the paper which eventually became our home, and Walter said that it could be a possibility. I went to this place as a young reporter because there was a protestant family living there, and the daughter was getting married and I was sent to cover the wedding. My grandfather used to joke about it saying that I would'nt be allowed in a protestant church. Walter went down in his car to see the house and he took somebody with him. When he saw it, it suited him and he put £100 deposit on it right away. He then phoned McMillan and said this is the place for me, so they sent him £3,500. It was an enormous sum those days.

Transcript tape 2, page 7 from the Tom Kenny collection

The Blythe papers also made reference to Macken's possible reinstatement as an Abbey actor and to some of the rumours circulating about Macken's views on the Abbey.

Blythe, in his report to the Directors dated 7 March 1951 wrote:

Some letters which Miss Mooney had from America indicated that, in spite of the failure of *The King of Friday's Men* in New York, Macken might get Hollywood offers and is unlikely to return to Ireland. Personally, I am inclined to hope that he will not apply for reinstatement here. Many things I have heard indicate that he has not a good word to say of the Abbey, which, he declares he came from Galway to save and which refused him to permit him to save it. Looking at the present financial position, I do not think we can actually afford to take him back. As he is an actor though he was supremely good in a couple of roles he was often something of an incubus owing to his limited range.

UCD archives (P24/ 750/ 3)

There must have been some discussion about Macken's possible return to the Abbey at the 7 March meeting. The minutes record that the Directors agreed:

...that if Mr. Macken returned to Dublin and applied for reinstatement that the matter could then be considered by the Board.

Macken's relationship with the Abbey Theatre management would appear at best to have been 'patchy' and this is reinforced in Blythe's next report, dated 21 March 1951, though his report does keep the door open for Macken in the event that appropriate roles were to arise in the future. This and the subsequent report dated the 4 April 1951 would appear to establish this relationship.

Walter Macken is back in Dublin from the United States. He was in the theatre yesterday but did not come up to the office. I do not know whether he has prospects of work in America, whether he proposes to devote himself entirely to writing or whether he will want to come back to the Abbey. With the present financial outlook, I do not personally feel particularly anxious to have him back, though if we were proposing another revival in the near future of *The King of Friday's Men* it would be hard to do without him. I think it will be best that, if he

applies for reinstatement, I should simply tell him that I will bring the matter up at the next meeting of the Board. (P24/ 750/ 4)

The Directors agreed ‘...to wait until Walter Macken approached Mr. Blythe.’

I met Walter Macken since the last meeting and had a short friendly conversation with him. No mention was made on either side of his possible return to the Abbey. I think, however, that the question will not arise. He told me that the selection of his last novel by the American Book Club or Book Guild, or whatever this organisation is called, will mean that he will get a minimum of 30,000 dollars. If that is true or nearly true, I should say that he will do no more acting.

(4 April 1951, P24/ 750/ 5)

The 1950s were to be Walter Macken’s most productive period. It may have also been his most distracting period, perhaps even confusing at times, as he continued to write plays, novels and short stories, to act on the stage and in film, to do radio play broadcasts and all this activity conducted from his home in Oughterard, Co. Galway.

In May 1951, shortly after his return to Galway from the USA, he was offered the opportunity to audition for a part in the Cagney Productions film *Bugles in the Afternoon* to be filmed in Hollywood. This he turned down.

Macken entered into correspondence shortly afterwards with Michael Powell of Michael Powell (Theatre) Ltd. This resulted in him accepting the part of Abélard in the Powell production of *Héloïse* by James Forsyth. The lead part of Héloïse was played by Siobhán McKenna. The play pre-viewed in The Kings Theatre, Southsea on 22 October 1951 and played other provincial venues before transferring to the Duke of York’s Theatre, St. Martin’s Lane, London, W. C. 2 on 14 November 1951.<sup>73</sup>

Picture 4.6: Cast page from the play programme.

THE

DUKE OF YORK'S THEATRE

ST. MARTIN'S LANE, LONDON, W.C.2.

Licensed by the Lord Chamberlain to MARIANNE DAVIS  
 Managing Agents: DUCHESS PRODUCTIONS LTD.  
 General Manager: E. W. CROSSLEY TAYLOR

HÉLOÏSE

Characters (in order of their appearance)  
 Characters (in order of their appearance)

A Singer ... .. GEOFFREY DUNN  
 Supino, a dealer ... .. JOHN BYRON  
 Hugo, servant to Abélard and afterwards Fulbert ESMOND KNIGHT  
 Héloïse ... .. SIOBHÁN MCKENNA  
 Fulbert, Uncle and guardian of Héloïse ... MERVYN JOHNS  
 Alberic, rival teacher to Abélard ... .. NIGEL GREEN  
 Theo, friend of both Abélard and Fulbert ... DAVID OXLEY  
 Abélard ... .. WALTER MACKEN  
 The Abbess of Argenteuil, old teacher of Héloïse EILEEN THORNDIKE  
 Nuns, followers of Héloïse ... { ELIZABETH CLOUGH  
 BETTY THOMPSON  
 CARMEL McSHARRY

THE PLAY IS PRODUCED BY MICHAEL POWELL  
 ASSISTANT PRODUCER KAY GARDNER  
 Scenery and Costumes by TERENCE MORGAN II  
 Music Composed by BRIAN EASDALE

HÉLOÏSE AND ABÉLARD

Romeo and Juliet, Paolo and Francesca, Dante and Beatrice, Héloïse and Abélard ... the potent names of long-dead lovers stir us still.  
 Eight hundred years have passed since Héloïse met Abélard face to face. In Paris, at the dawn of the Age of Reason. She was 17, he was 35: the two clearest and sharpest minds of their day, in Paris of the Schools and surging students, they were fated to meet and they mated like two eagles, and like eagles they fell from the heights and lost none of their nobility. Their love has made them immortal but it was their minds which gave greatness to their love.  
 In the Cemetery of Pere Lachaise, in Paris, they lie together in the same tomb, united in death as they are in our memory, and upon this stage.

Micheál Ó hAodha refers to this production in *Siobhán: A Memoir of an Actress*<sup>74</sup>. His book is focused on the career of Siobhán McKenna but Macken does not go unnoticed.

She was trying to avoid the stage-Irish stereotype, so popular in the West End and on Broadway, when she opted to play the eponymous part in *Héloïse* by James Forsyth at the Duke of York's Theatre in 1951, only to get a critical thrashing from the young and acerbic critic of the *Observer*, Kenneth Tynan. Of Siobhán's Héloïse and even more unfortunate Walter Macken's Abelard, Tynan wrote:

Their love scene kept reminding me of the aperçu about Jane Welsh and Thomas Carlyle, that it is as well that they married each other since that meant two unhappy people instead of four. Mr Forsyth engineers a nocturnal tryst for them by having Abelard awaken Héloïse by knocking something over and once they are together, the poetry begins to stand out rather like a vein on ones forehead. Their rapture smells of old, unopened

rooms... Siobhán McKenna, flinty of mein, offers a pinched Héloïse which, in its pallor and intensity, recalls the spooky lady in Charles Addams's drawings. Walter Macken invests Abelard with a soft Celtic guilt as soothing and as antiseptic as a bandage... The direction, by Michael Powell, has a sepulchral relevance of its own, and bears traces of the film studios in that it seemed to be taking a whole working day to get four minutes of action. (1994, 32)

As a curiosity a copy of Macken's pay slip for week ending the 3 November 1951 is reproduced in **Appendix 4.2** <sup>75</sup>.

After the Abbey Theatre fire on 18 July 1951 the company moved, following a two months stay at the Rupert Guinness Hall, to the Queen's Theatre where they were to play for the next 15 years. The capacity of the Queen's required a change in the Abbey practice of playing:

In the old theatre a new play, if it proved reasonably popular, would be taken off after a week or a fortnight's run, and later revived in the repertoire from time to time. Now with a larger capacity house the audience was used up more quickly; this virtually entailed an end to the repertory system. With a few exceptions revivals were no longer economically viable, and the only hope of covering expenses ... was in long runs of popular plays (Hunt, 1979, 178).

This was a situation that the Abbey manager was well aware of and on 9 April 1952 Blythe brought this to the attention of the Abbey Board members:

In the absence of new plays likely to fill the house, or during the continuance of the scarcity of such plays, I think we shall have to give preference in the matter of revival to plays which from their record seem likely to draw large audiences. Half empty nights in the Queens involves staggering losses.... (P24/ 751/ 7)



In the 12 March 1952 manager's report Blythe informed the Abbey Directors that the expected new play from M. J. Molloy had not arrived and suggested that if it was not received in 'the next few days' that the company '... should, provided Walter Macken is available, give a revival of *The King of Friday's Men* towards the end of May.'

(P24/ 751/ 5)

His report on the 26 March confirmed Macken's availability and that he was ready to rehearse and play in July. This position was confirmed in the Blythe's report dated 9 April 1952. But before he could submit his April report Blythe received a letter from Macken that changed what appeared to be an amicable arrangement.

In an addition to the 9 April report, on page 4, Blythe confirmed just having received a letter from Macken and that it stated the fee Macken expected to receive if he were to play the part of Bartley Dowd in the revival. Blythe's response to the requested fee was unequivocal.

(P24/ 751/ 6 & 7)

**Picture 4.7:** Extract from the Abbey Manager's report dated 9 April 1952 (p. 4).

WALTER MACKEN

Since writing the above, I have this morning received a letter from Walter Macken in which he demands £20. a week for playing the part of Bartley Dowd. I do not think that we ought for a moment to consider giving him such a salary. To do so would cause endless heartburning in the Company especially as it is known that Macken is a man who had never a good word to say for the theatre or for any play ever produced by us, except his own. Indeed to bring him back with the feeling there is about him amongst the players who noticed his cowardice when the demonstration against DESIGN FOR A HEADSTONE occurred and give him £20. per week might make discontent which would eventuate in trouble of some sort. Miss Mooney had a hunch that Walter would make excessive demands, unlike Denis O'Dea who immediately said he was entirely satisfied when I suggested £12. per week. Consequently some weeks ago we discussed possible alternatives to Walter. The most likely person for the part of Bartley, is I think, Geoffrey Golden. I should be somewhat afraid of him in the little love scene in the second act, but Miss Mooney believes that by taking him for individual drilling, she can get him to do even that bit quite satisfactory.

At this point in time, it would seem that whatever relation existed between Macken and the Abbey had broken down. But that was far from the case. Both parties must have clearly understood and accepted the interdependence between the Abbey Company and the playwright/ actor and, just two months after this disagreement on fees, on 4 June 1952, Blythe wrote to the Directors: ‘Walter Macken has sent in a new play which I think deserves serious consideration.’ (P24/ 751/10)

Blythe’s report, of 7 July 1952, illustrates the enthusiasm Blythe has for the new work.

*Home is the Hero*: As all the Directors were in favour of acceptance of Walter Macken’s new play, *Home is the Hero*, I sent him a contract without waiting for a formal decision of the Board. He informs me that he is willing to have the play cut if the Board think it necessary. He is also prepared to put extra lines in at a point at which Mr. O’Farachain thought the play weak. My own feeling is that this play, which is much better than anything we have had from Mr. Macken, should be staged as soon as possible. (P24/ 751/ 11)

By the 16 July *Home is the Hero* was ‘...in active rehearsal and promises well.... It looks, however, as if it will play more quickly than we thought and more extensive cutting may not be required. Some seven or eight minutes had been cut from the original script.’ (P24/ 751/ 12)

The play opened in the Queen’s Theatre at the end of July. It was underway for two weeks when Blythe circulated his next report on the 13 August 1952, **Picture 4.8**.

Picture 4.8

HOME IS THE HERO : HOME IS THE HERO was given its first performance on Monday fortnight and immediately showed signs of being a definite success. I never before heard so much applause through the acts on the first night of a new play. Of course, Macken, having been an actor and a producer for so long, knows well how to give a player the exit line which will bring forth a round of applause as he leaves the stage. I think HOME IS THE HERO plays as well as it reads except during the last two minutes when there is a certain feeling of stickiness and anti-climax. It is, on the whole, being very well played, though for the principal part an actor of more versatility and subtlety and more power of facial expression than Brian O'Higgins would be an advantage. It drew increasing audiences during its first week and filled the house on the three days on which it was played last week. This week it promises well and seems certain to justify retention for a fourth week. The financial return which it is giving emphasise how badly we need a few popular new plays.

The success of *Home is the Hero* at the Queen's was mentioned in all of the Manager's Reports up to 26 November 1952:

We can now feel more fully satisfied than before that with a little bit of luck and the arrival of two or three new plays as good as *Home is the Hero* (which, after all, is no masterpiece) we can face the future without any excessive financial trepidation. (P24/ 751/ 14, 27 August 1952)

And though described by Blythe as 'no masterpiece', he continued to be well satisfied with the play when in September he wrote, as well as mentioning an interest from the Cork Opera House, '....Walter Macken's play has done extremely well.' (P24/ 751/ 15)

Picture 4.9: Cast page from the Abbey Programme for the second week of the production.

# **ABBAY THEATRE**

— DUBLIN —

Playing at  
**THE QUEEN'S THEATRE**  
Pending Rebuilding and Enlargement  
of the Abbey

Monday, Wednesday and Friday, August 4th, 6th and 8th  
at 8 p.m.

## **HOME IS THE HERO**

A Play in Three Acts by WALTER MACKEN

Characters:

PADDY O'REILLY	Brian O'Higgins
DAYLIA (his wife)	Eileen Crowe
WILLIE (his son)	Mícheál O hAonghusa
JOSIE (his daughter)	Ite Ní Mhathúna
DOVETAIL	Harry Brogan
BID (his wife)	Máire Ní Chutháin
MRS. GREEN	Brid Ní Loinsigh
LILY GREEN	Siobhán Ní Eaghra
TRAPPER FLYNN	Eamon Guailí
MANCHESTER	Liam O Foghlú

Scene: Paddy's house in a back street in Galway City.  
Time: The present.

There will be Intervals of Ten Minutes between the Acts.

Play produced by RIA MOONEY  
Settings by VERA DUDGEON  
Stage Manager SEAN O MAONAIGH

### **ORCHESTRA**

The Orchestra, under the direction of Eamonn O Gallochbhair, will perform the following selections:

Overture	Il Tancredi	Rossini
Selection	Lilac Time	Schubert
Ceol Gaelach		O Gallochbhair

### **FORTHCOMING PRODUCTIONS**

**THE WHITEHEADED BOY**  
By Lennox Robinson

**THE PLAYBOY OF THE WESTERN WORLD**  
By J. M. Synge

NOTICE  
Coffee counter now open in Stalls Bar

**SMOKING WILL NOT BE PERMITTED IN THE AUDITORIUM**

Private collection (MB)

The successful run continued through September and by mid-October Blythe, with his continuous concerns for the Abbey's financial situation, told the Board that the attendance figures were holding up well enough to allow the run to continue.

*Home is the Hero* is still drawing reasonably well, and I think should be allowed to go on for another week or two before we begin to put up second last week and last week notices.

(P24/ 751/ 16)

By the end of October the run was drawing to a close and did so confirming Blythe's own words with 'a very good fortnight'.

If the fall in attendances shows signs at the beginning of next week of becoming more pronounced we can then put up 'Second Last Week' slips and then 'Last Week' slips, and end up with what I am sure will be a very good fortnight.

(751/ 17. 29 October)

Blythe's report on 26 November 1952 gave an overall summary of the statistics for the run for *Home is the Hero*. **Picture 4.10** reproduces paragraph 1 from the report and the reports first page is reproduced in **Appendix 4.3**.

**Picture 4.10**

HOME IS THE HERO ended what we called its 17th week on last Saturday. During the period, however, five nights were given up to other plays, namely, three nights to THE WHITEHEADED BOY and two nights to THE PLAYBOY OF THE WESTERN WORLD. On the other hand, there was an extra performance of HOME IS THE HERO on Sunday week, 16th November. Consequently, the actual run of HOME IS THE HERO amounted to sixteen weeks and two nights. Thus, it fell short of reaching its 100th performance by two nights.

The report mentioned that 4,099 people saw the play during its last week, an increase only from 3898 in the previous week. When the cash subsidy to the Abbey was taken into account '... the run of *Home is the Hero* left the theatre some £2,700 better off.'

(P24/ 751/ 18)

Hunt reinforcing his earlier comment about 'long runs of popular plays' wrote:

However, the company did have its popular successes among the new plays, some of which could be relied upon to stand up to revival. Walter Macken's *Home is the Hero* (28 July 1952) ran for seventeen weeks and proved a useful standby.... (1979, 182)

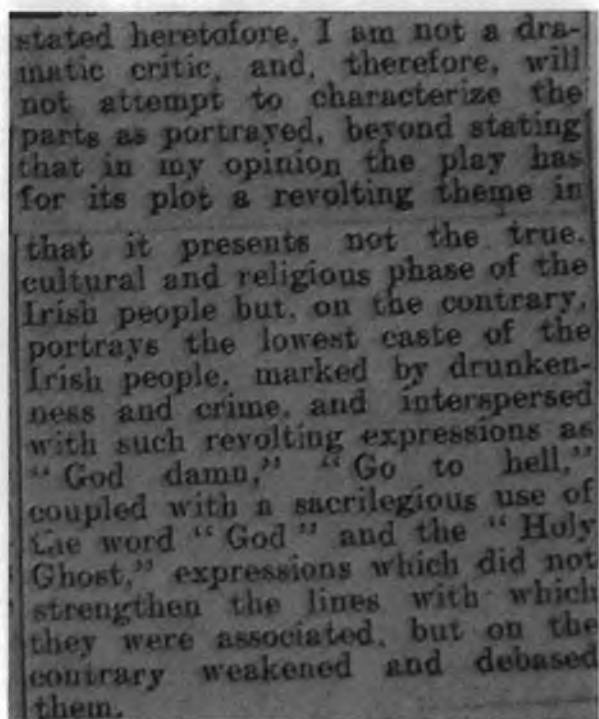
Unfortunately, a national newspaper strike started on the 11 July 1952 and by the time the papers were again available on the 30 August 1952 all they carried on *Home is the Hero* at the Queen's were the 'retained' notices.

But the play was not without its critics. A series of letters appeared in the 'Letters to the Editor' column of the *Evening Mail*, starting with a protest letter on the front page of the 7 October 1952 edition under the heading 'U.S. Visitor's Criticism of Abbey Play'. These extracts are from the Wuppertal Macken archive, Folder 57, which contains an extensive collection of press cuttings relating the successful run of *Home is the Hero*.

The letter, dated the 7 October, was from an American visitor, James J. Munro, from New York City, written from his Dublin address, the Shelbourne Hotel, the day after he attended a performance of *Home is the Hero*.

Priding himself '... in being able to distinguish between what is revolting and what is elevating' he wrote:

Picture 4.11 [As]



stated heretofore, I am not a dramatic critic, and, therefore, will not attempt to characterize the parts as portrayed, beyond stating that in my opinion the play has for its plot a revolting theme in that it presents not the true, cultural and religious phase of the Irish people but, on the contrary, portrays the lowest caste of the Irish people, marked by drunkenness and crime, and interspersed with such revolting expressions as "God damn," "Go to hell," coupled with a sacrilegious use of the word "God" and the "Holy Ghost," expressions which did not strengthen the lines with which they were associated, but on the contrary weakened and debased them.



He concluded with what turned out to be a prophetic observation, though his reasoning, even for 1952, was off the mark.

Suffice it to say that this play would have short shrift in New York and elsewhere in the States, if it dared to be presented, because of its dethronement and debasement of the true upstanding, cultural and religious character of the Irish people.

A reply to the Munro letter was published on the 9 October and was written by E. Stapleton, North Circular Road, Dublin. This is a long letter and the extract in **Picture 4.12** deals directly with the Munro criticism, mentioning specifically the language, drunkenness and crime portrait in the play that so offended Munro.

**Picture 4.12**



The play, both in its theme and characters, was, to my mind anyhow, typical of working-class life in any Irish country town, and Dublin, too, for that matter. The language used, the drunkenness and the type of crime portrayed in the play—the first being very typical, the second quite common and third not unduly rare — did not, in my opinion, detract in any way from the more estimable characteristics of the Irish people as suggested by our visitor from the U.S. In fact these sordid things only served to heighten the dramatic effect and focus a more intense light on those very characteristics we are concerned with.



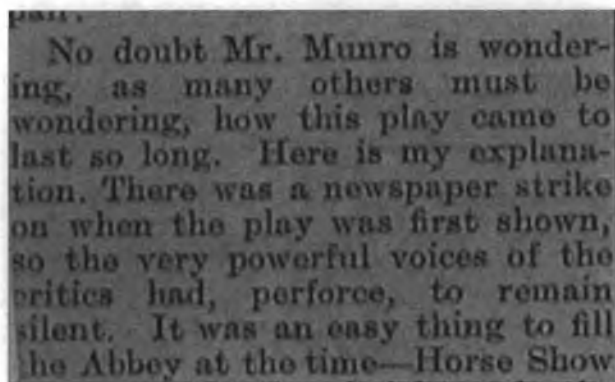
Two other responses to the Munro letter were published in the 'Letters Column' on the 10 October.

'Playgoer' wrote: 'We were ashamed and disgusted with it, and if this is sort of thing our National Theatre portrays as being Irish then we cannot complain if visitors to our country go away with wrong impressions.' While the short letter, also unsigned, from 'T' concluded: 'It is unkind to lure such innocents abroad with stories of the fair hills of holy Ireland. Let the Government refund Mr. Munro's dollars.'

On the 13 October Mrs. Marie Behan from Blackrock, Co. Dublin congratulated Mr. Munro on his criticism and as well as protesting her Irishness, mentioned that 'it was not for this type of culture that Pearse and the rest of the heroes died...'

She also offered an 'explanation' for the plays success.

**Picture 4.13**



No doubt Mr. Munro is wondering, as many others must be wondering, how this play came to last so long. Here is my explanation. There was a newspaper strike on when the play was first shown, so the very powerful voices of the critics had, perforce, to remain silent. It was an easy thing to fill the Abbey at the time—Horse Show

Three further letters were published on the 16 October.

Picture 4.14

**'Criticism of Abbey Play'**

Sir—I have read your correspondents' letters on this subject, and surely something is wrong. Why pick on Mr. Macken's play "Home is the Hero?" and give it both barrels? A few months back a film was shown in our fair city and it was greeted with a fanfare of trumpets and billed as "A picture about the real Ireland," and by a strange coincidence the locale was Galway. The Irish in this "epic" were a lot of "Wild Colonial Boys," who did nothing only fight and drink. It would seem that "the Hero" is being made the scapegoat. By all means let's have plenty of honest-to-goodness criticism, but let us be consistent and include all efforts to undermining what we call "our Irish Heritage."—"A. J."

C. Short, from Dalkey, agreed with Mr. Munro. 'The play is very crude and certainly does not portray the real Irish character, only the lowest. What a bad impression to foreigners!'

While R. Ward suggested, '...12 consecutive weeks is sufficient to prove that the people are getting the entertainment they desire; whether it is truly representative of the Irish way of life is immaterial.'

The *Leinster Express* in its 'Dublin Newsletter' on the 8 November 1952 wrote a long article on the attention the play was receiving. **Picture 4.15** is an extract from the article.

Picture 4.15

our national theatre. It would appear that some people have an exaggerated idea of our reputation as an island of saints and scholars, and that anything that tends to suggest the contrary is not worthy of consideration, and must be condemned. "Home Is The Hero" is no romanticised or idealised picture of life here, specifically in Galway, and it does not mince matters; and if there is exaggeration, it is the permitted exaggeration of the theatre. No-one could say that it is a libel or an unfair dramatisation of some aspects of Irish life, laid in an urban slum-like atmosphere. If we

*Dublin Opinion* provided a summary and criticism of the play in its October 1952 edition. This is a useful review of the play and is reproduced in full in **Appendix 4.4**.

The opening lines set the tone: **Picture 4.16(a)**

"Home Is The Hero," Walter Macken's new play, which is having so successful a run at the moment, is, without any doubt, a good play, with a fine tight central situation, packed with conflict and tension and excellent character drawing. As good a situation as any dramatist could have picked. The

Among the detailed comment in the *Dublin Opinion* on the play and the performances, the writer also make an interesting observation on the Abbey audiences. **Picture 4.16(b)**

One thing struck us more forcibly than ever before. The present-day Abbey audience seems to us to be little short of a menace. It wants to laugh at everything and it doesn't seem to mind what it laughs at. That's all right at a circus but it's not all right in a theatre like the Abbey. Whenever the word "bloody" was used, and it was used more than once, there was a gale of rather imbecile laughter. Rare fun! Say it again!...

*The Evening Herald* reported on the 29 November 1952 in its 'Miscellany' column on the total attendance during the 17 Week run, **Picture 4.17**

For the record: Walter Macken's  
"Home is the Hero" was seen by  
92,000 people during its run at  
the Queen's

What might have been thought to be the final word on this Abbey Theatre production at the Queen's appeared in the *Dublin Opinion*, who in it December 1952 issue produced this cartoon. **Picture 4.18**

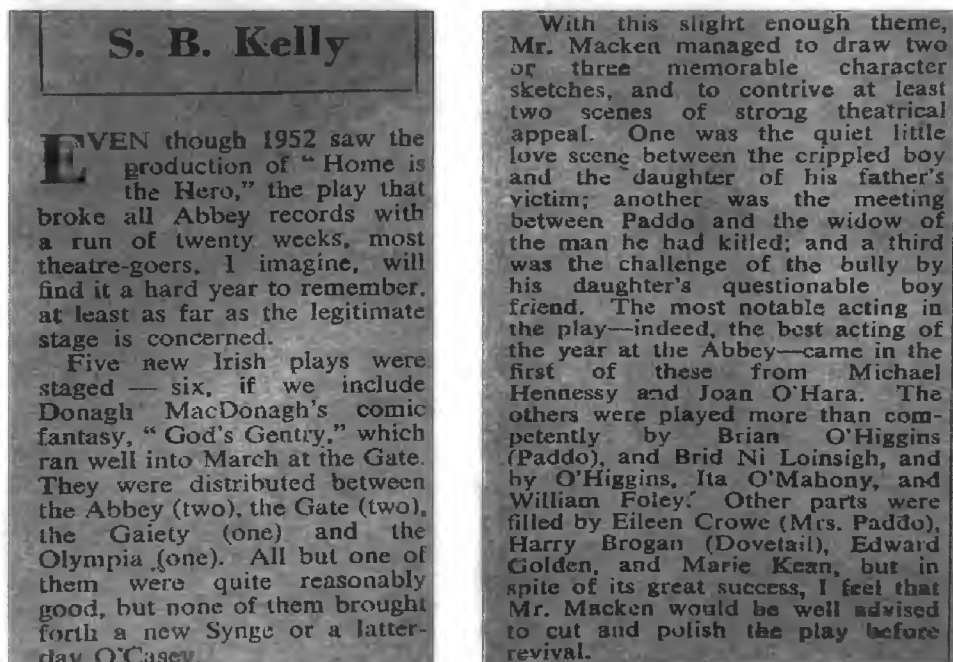


The final word on the 1952 production of *Home is the Hero* at the Queen's comes from S. B. Kelly. Writing in the *Irish Review and Annual 1952*, (page 35) a supplement to *The Irish Times*, Kelly wrote under the head-line:

"THE HERO" broke theatre records  
But 1952 a hard year to remember"

His opening paragraphs and the final one offer a flavour of his views, **Picture 4.19**.

Picture 4.19



During the *Home is the Hero* run Walter Macken continued with his own performance activity. He played Bartley O'Dowd in the Radio Eireann production of Molloy's *King of Friday's Men*. This was broadcast in the Radio Eireann 'playspot' at 8.15 p.m. on Sunday the 26 October.<sup>76</sup>

In the late spring of 1953 Cyril Cusack approached Macken to play Old Mahon in his production of *The Playboy of the Western World* at the Gaiety Theatre that summer. Macken accepted, though Cyril thought the play 'a big risk for the Gaiety in July.'<sup>77</sup>

Rehearsals started on the 6 July and the play opened on the 20 July with Cyril Cusack playing the Playboy and Siobhán McKenna as Pegeen Mike. The play was clearly a success with the audiences and the reviewers in the Irish national newspapers were positive about Macken's performance.

*The Irish Press*, 21 July 1953, page 5

Cyril Cusack's Big Success – *The Playboy*

... that no performance in recent years has had the reception from an audience quite so enthusiastic.... It was a treat to see Walter Macken again. His Old Mahon was as fine a piece of character acting as this actor has ever done. .... (NC)

*The Irish Independent*, 21 July 1953, page 4

*The Playboy at the Gaiety*

Excellent Revival of Famous Synge Play ... to a packed house.... Walter Macken gave a robust and hearty rendering of Old Mahon. (No credit)

*The Irish Times*, 21 July 1953, page 5

*The Playboy of the Western World*

.... Outside the principals, Walter Macken's Old Mahon and Seamus Kavanagh's Michael James were the best Synge. Mr. Macken was, perhaps, a shade too virile for "the ruins of three score" but he gave every syllable the full weight and flavour that Synge valued in the peasant speech he recorded so lovingly.' (K)

There was a further review in the *Times Pictorial* on the 25 July 1953. The reviewer, KMG, writing in the '*In the Theatre*' column described Walter Macken's performance as

...a powerful portrait of The Playboy's misused father (apart from his commanding presence he is about the only actor I know who looks as if he might possibly survive a couple of fearful blows of a loy).

On the 20 September 1953 at 8.30 p.m. Radio Éireann broadcast *Home is the Hero* with Macken reading the part of Paddo. The broadcast was announced in the *Radio Review* on the 18 September on the front page. The radio adaptation of the play was by Norris Davidson and the producer was Seamus Breathnach.

Writing in the *Radio Review* 'Listener's Log' on the 2 October (page 3), JHK, who had some reservations about the actual play, thought that '...on the air it was a gripping play with all the growing tensions a good bit of theatre engenders.'

Finally remarking:

Picture 4.20

I don't know how much of this success was due to the fact that I listened alone (as opposed to being immersed in an average Abbey audience); to the adaptation by Norris Davidson; or to the author having the support of the excellent Repertory Company, but no matter what the cause, this was a most thrilling bit of radio, and if it is repeated, I commend it to my readers.

The broadcast did offend some of the listeners and the first relatively mild letter of complaint appeared in the *Radio Review* also on the 2 October (page 3).

Picture 4.21

**SWEARING**

THE RE play last Sunday week, "Home Is the Hero," was a good, enjoyable play, but for one thing, that the name of God was mentioned so often.

Surely plays can be written and be just as entertaining without all this swearing? From beginning to end it was constant swearing in one form or another. I myself don't mind this kind of thing, but older people were shocked and wonder if this is what the modern age is like.—

"NOT A SPOIL SPORT," Bray.



This was followed on the 9 October (page 22) with letters from S. Mac Leanachain: ‘To say that I was shocked and mortified to think that the recent RE play *Home is the Hero* was typical Irish life is to put it mildly....’

While S. C. in Donegal wrote ‘....In disgust I switched off the play, as being too vulgar for the hearing of a couple of young visitors...’

The following June (1954) Cyril Cusack invited Macken to repeat his performance as Old Mahon for four performances in Paris from the 25-28 June 1954. Rehearsals were to start on the 14 June. The offer was not accepted. It appears to have coincided with the offer to play ‘Paddo’ in a New York production of *Home is the Hero*, to be produced by The Theatre Guild and Worthington Miner and scheduled for that autumn.

The request that Macken ‘...hold yourself available...’ arrived by telegram to his home in Oughterard on the 4 June. The telegram also asked for his suggestions on casting ‘besides Barry Fitzgerald’ and sought an immediate reply.

Picture 4.22 (a)

**Telegrams an poirt.**

Th méis an fíorán seo do dhéan le h-ion fíorán a chéanar mian gail an an telegram sa.  
(This form must accompany any enquiry respecting this telegram.)

Steady record on a (Marked in all)	3.14	of 344	New York	via Western Union
TYPE CODES AND CIPHERS FOR THE TELEGRAMS.			FOCAL.	Circle to n-loc (To Post)
Pádra annas an a) (Received here 10)			90	928

DO (TO) Mr. Walter H. Ken Gortagans Oughterard box  
Worthington Miner directing Leko Galway  
we want you for Paddo he and  
hold yourself available to start rehearsal  
with August 15 or 22 do you material  
Sawdun age ability and can 1 the play

Picture 4.22(b)

**Telexgram an Post.**

IN 1954 an person need to use to n-son papur a telexgram may send an an telexgram so.  
(This form must accompany any enquiry respecting this telexgram.)

<p>Direct message as a (Send to us)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">X</p>	<p>Office message as a telexgram service.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Focus.</p>
<p>Circle to n-100 (To Post)</p>	
<p>Circle to n-100 (To Post)</p>	

9 32

**TO**  
(TO)

With Irish accent, who played Dorell  
there and any other suggestions  
besides Samy Fitzgerald please reply  
immediately with copy of letter  
within two weeks also could I  
receive photo of Irish stage set  
and greetings build these. Theatre

The rehearsals for *Home is the Hero* started in mid-August and the pre-run in the Westport Country Playhouse opened on the 30 August. The play transferred to The Booth Theatre on Broadway, where it opened on the 22 September 1954.

*Home is the Hero* was well received in Westport by the Westport Country Playhouse audiences. *The Stamford Advocate* wrote on the 31 August, 'Play set in Ireland is well received at Westport Theatre' and the *Westporter Herald* on the 2 September reporting on the play under the heading 'Playhouse finally gives reviewers chance to Laud' went on to describe it as:

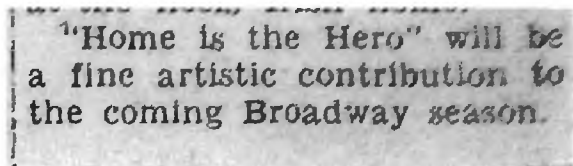
Dealing solely in human values, Mr. Macken tells a tight little story of the happenings in the household of a man, Paddo O'Reilly, on the day he comes home after spending five years in jail for killing a man in a fight.

It continued with a description of the play and reported positively on the performances. On Macken the reporter wrote: 'Walter Macken is himself a fine character delineator in both his writing and his acting of Paddo....'

The only reservation expressed concerned the director, Worthington Miner. The reporter considered he had staged the play 'for maximum effect except in the scene of the final meeting of Paddo and Josie's suitor...'

The article concluded that:

**Picture 4.23**



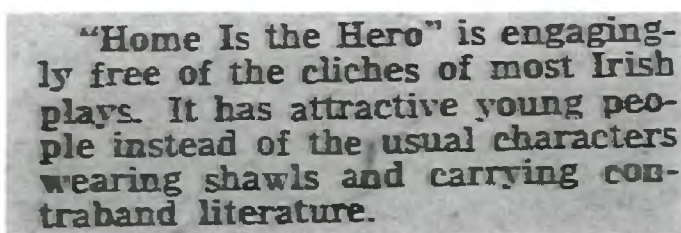
'Home is the Hero' will be a fine artistic contribution to the coming Broadway season.

An undated review in *Variety* by Doul on the Westport performances was very complimentary of the play and the actors. Doul described Macken as giving 'a standout performance in the title part.' The reviewer considered:

The Theatre Guild has hit a fine stride with this sombre new play by actor-playwright-novelist Walter Macken who also plays the central role....

The review ends with a very positive comment about the director, 'Television has given theatre a whole crop of directors. On the basis of *Home is the Hero*, Minor is an outstanding "new" one.' On the play itself Doul wrote:

**Picture 4.24**



"Home Is the Hero" is engagingly free of the cliches of most Irish plays. It has attractive young people instead of the usual characters wearing shawls and carrying contraband literature.

*The Norwalk Hour* on 1 September wrote ‘Country Playhouse pre-Broadway play *Home is the Hero* is acclaimed.’

We can get a view from Macken himself on the dilemma a playwright faces when cast in his own play, from his article published on 12 September 1954 in the *New York Times*. In the article entitled ‘Author vs. Actor’ he describes some of his own thoughts on the possible conflict of interest. In some ways it may give a pointer to his own behaviour in the US production of *Home is the Hero* and indicate that he adopted a conscious hands-off approach and concentrated only on his role as an actor. The article is reproduced in **Appendix 4.5**

Advanced publicity for the play Broadway run included a photograph of Walter Macken over the bye-line ‘To act in his own play’ in the *New York Times* on 27 August. A cartoon which showed the whole cast appeared in the *Brooklyn Eagle Sun* on 19 September, the week before the play opened in New York and the *New York Post* printed a line drawing of Macken with two of the cast on the same date, **Pictures 25a and 25b.** <sup>78</sup>

**Picture 4.25(a)** *Brooklyn Eagle Sun*



The Broadway run for *Home is the Hero* was not a success. There were in total 30 performances so it could not be viewed in the same light as the disastrous four performance Broadway run of *The King of Friday's Men* in 1951.

A summary of the credits for the Broadway production of *Home Is the Hero* reads as follows:<sup>80</sup>

Booth Theatre, (9/22/1954 - 10/16/1954)  
Opening: Sep 22, 1954  
Closing: Oct 16, 1954 Total Performances: 30

Setting: The general downstairs room in a house in a long avenue of houses in a town in Ireland.

Opening Night Production Credits:  
Produced by The Theatre Guild and Worthington Miner  
Staged by Worthington Miner  
Entire production designed by Marvin Reiss  
Stage Manager: Elliot Martin

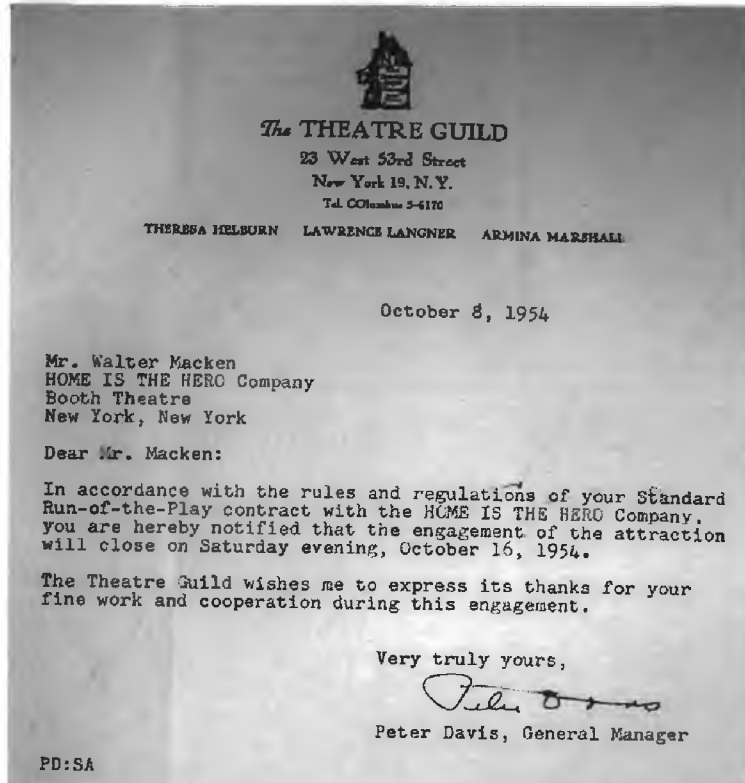
Opening Night Cast:

Glenda Farrell	Daylia
Frances Fuller	Mrs. Green
Peggy Ann Garner	Josie
Donald Harron [*]	Willie O'Reilly
Loretta Leverage	Lily Green
Walter Macken	Paddo O'Reilly
J. Pat Malley	Dovetail
Christopher Plummer	Manchester Monaghan
Art Smith	Trapper
Ann Thomas	Bid

[\* Cast change from the Westport production]

The Broadway performance of *Home is the Hero* was terminated by The Theatre Guild after the Saturday performance on 16 October 1954<sup>81</sup>.

Picture 4.27



The play was not a success on Broadway though it did offer Macken the consolation of raising his profile as a writer and actor in America. Immediately arising was an interest from the William Morris Agency on behalf of United Artists for Macken to perform in film but again Macken declined these offers and returned to Galway and to his writing shortly after the play closed. The clear impression is that the overall outcome of this experience was one of disappointment.

This must have been an experience that Macken could well have done without and his mood could not have been helped when he read four weeks later 'A Letter from New York' by Vivian Mercier, published in *The Irish Times* on 2 November 1954.

Under the banner 'From Galway to Broadway, *Home is the Hero*', the article ranged over Macken's performance as a playwright and actor. It contained Mercier's critique of the Broadway production of *Home is the Hero* and attempted to balance this by quoting from other reviewers.

In contrast to the reviews I had read, we felt that the play was essentially a worthwhile one, but that Mr. Macken botched his own handiwork by a monotonous, unimaginative performance.

Regarding the writing, Mercier goes on to say:

... it was Mr. Macken's handling of them [the lines] that was nearly all wrong. A better-trained or more gifted actor could have suggested with a smile, a way of walking, and a gesture or two, the latent charm of Paddo. Mr. Macken seems obsessed with strength in his plays and novels; it is also one of the qualities that his acting strives for, at the expense of everything else, including ultimately, strength itself. Looking back on his performance in *The King of Friday's Men*, I can see that it too suffered from monotony and vain pursuit of force.

Towards the end of his article Mercier, under the sub-heading 'Bright Future' does make some positive comments:

Having written what I believe to be the unpleasant truth about Mr. Macken's second failure to impress Broadway, I want to write with equal sincerity – and, I hope, truth – about his bright future as a playwright. He may yet prove a worthy successor to Sean O'Casey with whom the New York critics are prone to compare him to his disadvantage.

The number of striking characterisations given, in a play whose mood and tempo were so unmistakably Irish, by a cast whose accents never brought them nearer to Ireland than Boston – or, at best, Glasgow – was in itself sufficient proof that Mr. Macken, the playwright, has begun to master his craft.

Commenting on his favourite performances he mentions Donald Harron as the crippled Willie and Loretta Leversee as Lily Green:



... the almost uniformly high standard of performances in the supporting roles would have been impossible if the players had not the right kind of material to work with.

He concluded with the recommendation that:

Mr. Macken should take heart, allot himself a minor role in his next play, concentrate his undeniable talents on writing rather than acting and turn his present defeat into a future victory.

The full article is reproduced in **Appendix 4.7**.

*Home is the Hero* also received attention from a less likely source. George Jean Nathan in a letter to Sean O' Casey written on 27 November 1954 mentioned the Broadway production in his final paragraph.<sup>82</sup>

Macken's *Home is the Hero* seemed a very dull dramatic attempt to me, hitting one note throughout so insistently that a dreary monotony, unrelieved by writing of any beauty, pervaded the stage. One could foretell its failure after seeing but an act of it.

Whatever any of Macken's critics may say about his writings or his performances none other than Nathan have described them as 'very dull' and this has to prompt a question about the production, the direction and performances. Yet, strangely missing from either the Mercier or Nathan criticism is any comment on the overall production or indeed, on the set or wardrobe.

Viewing some of the stills from the Broadway production has to raise some questions.

**Picture 4.28a** Shows a general view of the set with, from left to right, Josie, Daylia, Paddo and Willie.



Tom Kenny collection

**Picture 4.28b** shows Bid and Dovetail on the ground, with Josie on the stairs, Paddo, Daylia and Willie.



Other photos from the same collection are in **Appendix 4.8**.

Contrast this setting with the setting described in the original published version of *Home in the Hero*.<sup>83</sup>

In the published script Macken describes the floor as ‘red-brick’ and the stairs covered with “a narrow strip of linoleum, highly polished and wearing away.” In mentioning the exits, he tells that the toilet is outside

...because Councils who build houses for the poorer classes think a toilet in the yard is better than none at all and damn good enough for them (Page 1).... There is a stool on either side of the fire, rough-wooden, highly polished from human seats. There is a wooden table in the centre of the floor, seeming to suffer from pernicious anaemia it is scrubbed so white (Page 2).

Willie, Paddo and Daylia's crippled son, is a shoemaker. 'He wears a leather apron. The last is resting on a stout, narrow, wooden box.' (Page 2)

Daylia tells on page 10 of the script that she worked 'in the big house in Taylor's Hill,' and on page 11 we learn that Paddo was the '...pride of the Transport and General Workers and weren't all the skivs in Galway cracked about him.'

This description and the individuals' backgrounds' are in stark contrast to what we see in the photographs of the O'Reilly living room from the Broadway production.

It does also raise a question about the presentation of Macken's work and the relationship between Macken, the author and actor, and the producer/ director? We will have noticed something similar in the reviews of the 1946 production of *Mungo's Mansion* at the Abbey Theatre (Page 72).

Setting *Home is the Hero* in a middle-class home must have challenged audience credibility. Consider the shock of Daylia's opening line on the audience, 'All but didn't get it, I did. The mane hound! "Me husband comin' home after five years" I says...' This is an example of the dialogue attempting to beggar the setting and the costumes.

*Home is the Hero* was published by Macmillan & Co. Ltd., in 1953 and the published play was reviewed at the time by a number of local American newspapers.<sup>84</sup>

In *The Lexington (Kentucky) Herald Leader* on the 8 August 1953, Jerry Finch wrote:

With this play ... Macken didn't disappoint us a bit. Still present is the simplicity of story, trueness of characters and his warm fondness of his fellow countrymen. His talent is evident in his smooth craftsmanship, for there is no strain of the hack nor flatness and contrived interest-bait of the inept writer striving to produce his "great novel" ....

*The Richmond News Leader* reviewer, L. Tully Read wrote on the 7 September 1953, *Home is the Hero* '...is the work of a talented and accomplished playwright. Each character is sharply drawn; structurally, the play is near perfection'. Mentioning its long run in the Abbey, he concluded that it was '...obviously due to the poor output rather than the superiority of this play over its predecessors. *Home is the Hero* is an excellent play but it is not equal to the best Synge, Yeats or O'Casey.'

In October 1954 Macmillan's sent Macken a review of the play from the *Saturday Review* and this provides another view on the Broadway production. **Appendix 4.9** contains the full review.

#### Picture 4.29

'Unfortunately, this play, which set...'

a record when produced by the Abbey Theatre and which reads well in book form, has lost a great deal in its New York production. Except for Mr. Macken's Paddo the Irish melody is forced or inadequate. Worthington Miner's direction is mechanical and treats the play as an interminable series of posed sequences. Keeping the grim story mildly amusing seems to be the approach. As a result, the actors make generally attractive but patently synthetic solo appearances. There is seldom a moment where their good acting instincts can assert themselves to give us a response that seems to come out of the interrelationship of characters. *Home* may be the hero, but unheroic producers can reduce its proportions until it is barely distinguishable from a unit in a mass housing project.

—HENRY HEWES

In parallel with this American experience interest in Walter Macken as a playwright and actor continued in Ireland in 1954.

The Abbey Theatre speculated on the possibility of another Macken play. Blythe on the 14 April in his report to the Directors wrote:

It is rumoured in the theatre, on I don't know what authority, that Walter Macken is likely to submit a new play soon. (P24/ 753/ 1, page 7)

The next mention of the new play is in the Blythe report dated 28 July 1954.

I wrote to Walter Macken today following a performance of *Home is the Hero* by a group called the National Arts Theatre, asking him to allow the play to be performed in Dublin. And I added a query as to whether we were likely to get another from him. He replied that he was working on a play but that as he was going to New York shortly he could not give me any idea as to when he would finish it. As soon as it was ready, however, he would let us have it.

(P24/ 753/ 7)

Blythe considering a revival of *Home is the Hero* wrote the following in the same report but this matter was not to be raised again until 1955. 'There will be some weeks soon in *Home is the Hero* but I think that we ought to hold it over for a little while if possible.'

Towards the end of 1954 Macken as an actor was the subject of some discussion in correspondence between Cyril Cusack and Sean O'Casey. Cusack was particularly interested to cast him as Father Boheroe in the production of *The Bishop's Bonfire* being planned for 1955.<sup>85</sup>

This correspondence also touched on Macken's frame of mind at the time and how a professional actor such as Cusack viewed his commitment to acting. We also catch a glimpse of Macken's attitude to O'Casey.

Letter from Cusack to O'Casey dated 28/10/54

If Walter Macken is back from the States in time I've an [idea] he would make an excellent Father Boheroe.

O'Casey to Cusack dated 19/11/54

... but what would you play then? Dan? Or what about Father Boheroe.

Cusack to O'Casey dated 10/12/54

.... I very much wanted Wally for Boheroe, but his recent experience with his own play on Broadway seems to have taken the stuffing out of him. I don't know if Ryan (**Footnote 4.1**) made the right approach when writing Wally. He showed some reluctance in the first place to approach him at all, because of the uncertainty of Macken's availability for tour. I suppose strictly speaking he is not a professional. He regards writing his premier talent and objective, whereas I feel his [personality] and sense of theatre is a great asset to the stage and to lose him would be a loss to Irish theatre. Bill [Ryan] wrote him alright, but Wally replied to the effect that he was giving up acting all together. He took part in his own play in New York. Ryan says he got bad notices; I've heard from another source that they liked his acting, but the play was a flop. I suppose they told him to do either one thing or the other and he's taken their advice. I'll write him myself ....

A letter from O'Casey dated the 11 December 1954 <sup>86</sup> crossed with the previous Cusack letter. This is a long and detailed letter and in it he points out to Cusack his reservations about Macken being cast as Fr. Boheroe. In the letter O'Casey quotes directly from the Vivian Mercier article, published in *The Irish Times* on the 2 November 1954 (Page 143 and **Appendix 4.7**). O'Casey repeated the comments written about Macken being

**Footnotes 4.1:** Bill Ryan: 'I spoke to Bill Ryan who does business management for me in the theatre at home ...' (Letter from Cusack to O'Casey dated 28/10/54).

‘...obsessed with strength in his plays and novels...’ and went on to write: ‘This would never do for Boheroe; there is none of the bully or shouter in Boheroe; tho’ there is enthusiasm and fun in him...’

On Mercier’s observation on the New York critics comparison of Macken and O’Casey, he said: ‘I wish the critics wouldn’t do this, for it doesn’t add to my friends. I do hope he [Macken] won’t take the failure too much to heart.... We all have to suffer defeat- maybe many times.’

He concludes this part of his letter with some remaining reservations about Macken for the part with:

By the way, if you still think of Macken as Boheroe (What of the Canon? Might he not be better here; or would he indulge in the besetting sin of “strength” again in this part?) by all means get him, if you can - you know more about Casting than I do. But Boheroe power is gentle power; none the less strong for that.

Cusack to O’Casey dated 23/12/54

.... Macken I wanted for Boheroe. Apart from the fact that he disclaims acting, he cannot conceive that an “anti-Catholic writer like O’Casey” could conceive a catholic priest. .... (Footnote 4.2)

Separate from this correspondence, O’Casey in a letter to George Jean Nathan (Footnote 4.3) on 24 November 1954 mentioned Macken and the Mercier article in *The Irish Times*. (See page 145, this chapter for Nathan’s reply.)

**Footnotes 4.2 (a):** Pat Layde eventually played the part of Boheroe in *The Bishop’s Bonfire*. Cusack wrote to O’Casey before the 10 March 1955 (the letter is undated), “Layde as Boheroe continues to improve”. The play had a 5 week run and was directed by Tyrone Guthrie. (b) Christopher Murray comments on the Boheroe casting in his Biography of Seán O’Casey.<sup>87</sup> “Cusack wanted Walter Macken as the liberal Fr. Boheroe but O’Casey feared Macken would be too strong for the role, which went to the young Pat Layde, a brilliant but flawed actor.”

**Footnote 4.3:** George Jean Nathan (1882 - 1958), American drama critic and editor (see: <http://www.arts.cornell.edu/english/awards/nathan/bio.html>)



I was sorry to read in “The Irish Times” that Macken’s play “Home is the Hero” has ended its run. He is a clever man and Ireland needs a good playwright. He had a record run in the Abbey, but, then, New York isn’t Dublin. I imagine Macken should give all his time to one or the other thing -acting or writing- He has written some lusty novels as well. (Krause, 1980, 1123)

The next performance of *Home is the Hero* was by the Liverpool Repertory Company, at the Playhouse, for a run commencing Tuesday 30 November 1954. (Footnote 4.4)

In 1954 Macken’s fourth novel, *Sunset on the Window Panes*, was published by Macmillan and Co. Ltd. Set in the imaginary village of Boola, this novel may well predate Macken’s unpublished play *The Boola Boy* discussed in Chapter 6.

Early in 1955 the question of a revival of *Home is the Hero* was discussed by the Abbey Directors. On 26 January the play with three cast changes was ready and the decision was that it be ‘laid aside.’

On 23 February Blythe confirmed to the Directors ‘We are now in the position that *Home is the Hero* and *The Glorious Uncertainty* are each... ready for presentation.’

(P24/ 754/ 4)

The Abbey Theatre revival of *Home is the Hero* went ahead in the summer. It alternated with *The Plough and the Stars* but with attendances lower than expected it was replaced by John McCann’s *Blood is Thicker than Water* before the end of July. (P24/ 754/ 10)

Walter Macken’s new play, *Twilight of a Warrior*, must have been received in the Abbey sometime in July 1955. Though nothing is recorded in the Abbey Board minutes about

**Footnote 4.4:** Paul Keogh from the Liverpool Record Office informed me that they hold a set of the programmes of the Liverpool Playhouse (H792.1PLA) and that *Home is the Hero* was performed by the Liverpool Repertory Company, at the Playhouse, for a run commencing Tuesday 30 November 1954. The Playhouse archive also contains a prompt copy of the play (number 166). To research this further would require a visit to the Record Office or the use of one of their Research Officer on fee paying basis. I thought it sufficient to have had the performance identified and confirmed. This particular performance is mentioned by Macmillan’s in a letter to Walter Macken discussing the publishing of *The Mirror of Homer* and dated 8 November 1957.<sup>88</sup>

receiving the play, the minutes of the 14 July mention that 'Mr Blythe said he wished to read again *Twilight of a Warrior* by Walter Macken.' On the 27 July in the 'Plays' section of the minutes Blythe confirmed:

... he had read it [*Twilight of a Warrior*] a second time and was now in favour of acceptance. The Board agreed that the play needed cutting and decided to accept the play on condition that Walter Macken agreed to do the cutting which was considered necessary.

The question of cutting the play was resolved before the next meeting, 10 August 1955, and Macken had been sent his contract.

When sending Walter Macken his contract, I referred to the fact that we all felt it needed considerable cutting. In a civil reply he stated that he was willing to let the producer cut it as much as was deemed necessary. (P24/ 754/ 11)

The casting of *Twilight of a Warrior* did not receive the instant attention given to *Home is the Hero* in 1952. By the 28 September Blythe was able to reassure the Directors that Eddie Golden had read the play and thought well of it and that he would submit a suggested cast at the next meeting. Eddie Golden was to direct the play and Miss Mooney was '... quite agreeable' to this arrangement. By the 12 October Eamon [Eddie] Golden was reported ready to start rehearsals and a suggested cast was submitted to the Board. There was some dissent among the Directors about some of the suggest cast members and the matter was left for final agreement to Mr. Blythe and the director.

*Twilight of a Warrior* opened on the 21 November 1955. It was not a success.

The Board meeting on the 30 November agreed that '... if *Twilight of a Warrior* was doing well for the week commencing 5 December it will be retained for the week commencing 12 December.'

There had been a poor audience response to the play, summarised in the Manager's report.

The Macken play opened to an audience which apart from 'paper' was quite small ...Twilight of a Warrior ... was well played and, on the whole received newspaper notices calculated to bring in the public. Yet it never picked up throughout the week and brought in only middling audiences on the Saturday.

(P24/ 754/15)

The play run was terminated after its third week and 'may be reckoned as a definite failure from the point of view of popular appeal...' (29 December 1955)

The newspapers critics were positive about the Play.

*The Irish Times* reviewer liked the play. K commented on the main character, Dacey Adam, and the 'Thanks' the Abbey audience owed to the author who has brought 'a new, different, and contemporarily credible character onto the Abbey stage'. While mentioning the 'sometimes too-obvious' subordinate situations, K thought this an 'Abbey play which has something of interest to say and which says it with immense theatrical effectiveness.'

*The Irish Press*, reported it as 'his best effort yet' and as Macken's 'most significant contribution to the theatre to date'. But because of the theme the reviewer considered that it was '... unlikely to enjoy anything like the popularity of his earlier plays' due to the play's 'very much over-sustained note of tragedy.'

*The Irish Independent* described it as a 'Play of Contradictions.' Due to '.... its classical theme of the soldier carrying the war into the peace ... yet the approach to the characters is on the psychoanalytical plane of modern intellectual drama'. The reviewer considered 'It is straining credibility in Dacey too far when his method of defeating this new opponent [Abel] is to make him, a stranger, a spectator of the most intimate and sordid family row.'

Robert Hogan mentions *Twilight of a Warrior*, as possibly Macken's best play. (1968, 65)

Blythe outlined to the Directors what he saw as the 'great fault' with the play.

**Picture 4.30**

It seems to me, however, that the great fault of the play from the point of view of really drawing the public is not its wordiness but that we see no generous or big-hearted side to Dacey Adams whereas actually he would have had to have such a side in addition to his domineering propensities if he was to attain the position and public esteem that he is supposed to have had. The want of generosity meant that the sympathy of the audience was not stirred.

(754/ 15, page 2)

**Appendix 4.10** contains the complete paragraph from the Manager's Report (P24/ 754/ 15, page 2) dated 30 November 1955.

Extracts from the reviews of *Twilight of a Warrior* by the Irish national papers and the later Macken plays are in **Appendix 4.11**

Though 1955 saw the publishing of his book of short stories *The Green Hills and other Stories* as well as *Twilight of a Warrior*, it seems fairly certain that during the autumn and winter Macken spent some time assessing his mixed career as an actor, playwright, writer of novels and short-stories as well his family commitments. By the end of 1955 he confided in a letter to one of his cousins

I have given up acting all together and am endeavouring to live solely on the pen.

(Macken, 2009, 323)

During November 1955 O’Casey mentioned again the Macken plays in a letter written to Cyril Cusack. His letter was dated 18 November. He also referred to the letter he received from Nathan on *Home is the Hero*. ‘I’ve read Macken’s *Mungo* & Nathan has written to me about *Home is the Hero* &, in my opinion, so far, Macken doesn’t ring a bell. I hope his new play may be something worth while.’<sup>89</sup>

The new play O’Casey was referring to was *Twilight of a Warrior*.

But *Home is the Hero* was not quite finished in America. In February 1956, an abridged version (50 minutes within a one hour programme and with a cast of six) was done by Kraft Theatre on TV with Brian Donlevy playing Paddo and Anthony Perkins as Willie.

In a letter to Macken from one of the cast, it was described as ‘most superior television’. (Macken, 2009, 327)

Picture 4.31: *Home is the Hero* on American TV<sup>90</sup>

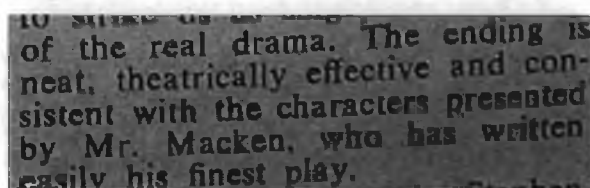


New York Times,  
22 January 1956



Herald Tribune,  
25 January 1956

The BBC's choice for their Sunday Night Theatre on 8 April 1956 was *Twilight of a Warrior*. **Appendix 4.12(a)** shows the listing from the *Radio Times* and **Appendix 4.12(b)** shows the front page of the camera script and the final three pages.<sup>91</sup> The end pages are included to show how the programme script writers managed Dacey's death scene at the end of the play. This is a problem scene, over-long in the original writing and unacceptably melodramatic. The camera script condenses the final five pages of the published script into a spare two and a half pages. This alteration drew a complimentary comment from the reviewer, G. A. Olden, **Picture 4.32**.



Olden's review of the BBC Sunday night play appeared in *The Irish Times* on 12 April 1956. In it he described the production as '...an intensely serious piece of work, a study of an ex-man of action who has degenerated into a bully'. The full review is in **Appendix 4.13**

In July 1956 the BBC encouraged Macken to London to play Bartley Dowd in their version of *The King of Friday's Men*, recorded for the Third Programme.

There appears to be no further public sight of Walter Macken during the remainder of 1956 and until late in 1957. We can reasonably assume that he had returned to his writing. His semi-biographical novel *Sullivan* was published by Macmillan in 1957 and there was a passing reference to 'a new play' from Walter Macken in the Abbey minute book on 23 October 1957.

On 20 November the new play, entitled *Mirror of Homer*, arrived at the Abbey and the question of changes to play was discussed at the Abbey Board meeting. The Manager's report confirmed that he had been in touch with the author and that some initial changes were to be made to the script.

*Mirror of Homer*

Walter Macken has agreed to make some changes in the *Mirror of Homer* to increase credibility. In particular he will eliminate the two younger illegitimate children of Sarah who though talked about did not appear on stage....

The Board agreed that the *Mirror of Homer* was a bad title for the play and that Mr. Blythe should write to the author asking him to suggest other titles.

(P24/ 756/ 18)

By the 11 December 1957 suggest alternative titles had been received and the matter was not to rest there. 'Mr. Robinson is going to read the play again with a view to seeing whether he can suggest a really good title.'

(P24/ 756/ 19)

The list of suggested titles received Board attention on the 30 December and the one selected was *The Looking Glass*. Ernest Blythe was to '... write to Walter Macken telling him so.' At the same meeting a 'suggested cast' was submitted for approval by the Directors.

(P24/ 756/ 20)

Blythe reported on the 15 January that Walter Macken has come back to him with a modified title. The play was now to be called *Look in the Looking Glass*. He had accepted this and 'had the play announced on the window board under that title.' This change was 'approved by the Board.'

The play went into rehearsals and by the 29 January Blythe was satisfied to confirm to the Board that the play '...seems to me to be more effective on the stage than on the typed page.' He thought Michael Hennessy 'as the angry young writer and Joan O'Hara as the girl from the orphanage are well suited to their parts.'

Somewhat surprisingly, a problem in detail emerged during the rehearsals and this prompted Blythe to consult the author. This was regarding how Janey should deliver her final line, the play's closing line. Joan O'Hara expressed concern about this and after

consultation with the author the line 'Oh Mico, will it always be like this, tell me, will it always be like this?' was to be delivered in a pleased and confident way.

By the end of February there was uncertainty whether *Look in the Looking Glass* would run for two or three weeks. The play was described as more pleasing than *Twilight of a Warrior* 'in which there were no characters whom the audience could like.' (26 February 1958)

*Look in the Looking Glass* was not a success and Blythe in his report to the Directors on 19 March appears yet again to change his position about the play and the cast.

The Macken play is turning out to be a definite failure. It plays much less well than it reads. Moreover, I am afraid that we were not altogether fortunate in the matter of casting.

This particular Manager's report is long and detailed, It criticises the performers, mentions the misfortune with the weather, it snowed on the opening day, and the well publicised competitive first night at the Gaiety (10 March 1958).

Blythe in his reports was always frank with his opinions on all matters to do with the theatre. We will have glimpsed examples of this frankness, for example the reference to *Mountain Flood* by Jack P. Cunningham in August 1950 (P24/ 749/ 8) and noticed that his remarks extended to the players, authors, performances, etc. Another example of this frankness is his comment about Walter Macken in the context of the disappointingly short run of *Look in the Looking Glass*, also part of this report.

... [Macken] has few personal friends or admirers amongst theatre-goers. Instead of the ordinary sheaf of wires there was one single telegram to hand to him wishing him luck when he arrived at the theatre for the first performance.

(19 March 1958)



The decision to cut short the run of *Look in the Looking Glass* was approved by the Board on 19 March. (Footnote 4.5)

It was very much in this vein, the disappointment with *Look in the Looking Glass* that Blythe wrote to Macken on 26 March. (Appendix 4.14) <sup>92</sup>

The Board also noted that the filming of *Home is the Hero* was scheduled to start on 21 March.

The Abbey Board minutes on 2 April 1958 summarised the failure of *Look in the Looking Glass*, recording that 'The Macken play fulfilled our gloomiest expectation and did worse in its second week than in the first....' At the same meeting the Board 'noted' a letter from Macken to Blythe stating:

... that he is killing the play in its present form and has withdrawn the manuscript from his publisher. He wonders whether he ought not to give up trying to write plays and stick to novels.

Macken's publisher, Macmillan and Co., was not all that positive about publishing the play though they did offer to do so. In a letter dictated by Lovat Dickson, dated 8 November 1957, he pointed out that plays without a West-End production did not sell well and that they 'have made exceptions in your case because you have been with us for so long and there is a special bond between you and this firm.'

This letter <sup>93</sup> gives the reader an understanding of the good relationship that had developed between Macken and his publisher over the years and the final paragraph of this letter illustrates this point (Picture 4.33)

**Footnote 4.5:** When writing plays Macken prepared sketches of the stage settings. A few of these have survived and are in the Wuppertal archive. A preliminary sketch for the *Mirror of Homer* with title and character names is reproduced in Appendix 4.15.

### Picture 4.33

We are perfectly willing to publish THE MIRROR OF HOMER, but we thought it only right that we should show you that we do it with some apprehension, and if the venture does not come off there would be little chance of our being able to publish another play for you. I have been perfectly frank, as is right between old friends, and I hope you will be just as frank in return. If you feel that Samuel French could do a better job for you, then I will ask Cyril Hogg, the head of that firm, if he will publish the play and manage your dramatic rights on it. If, on the other hand, you want us to do it, then I hope I have shown in this letter that apprehensive though we are as to the prospects, we are perfectly willing to take one more chance.

The reviews in the Irish national daily papers of *Look in the Looking Glass* were not positive. All three papers had reservations about the play.

MK, *The Irish Times*, who described himself as an ‘unreasonable admirer’ of Macken’s talents’, thought himself ‘in a minority of one’ in not liking the play. He described the play’s first act as ‘...short and funny, the second short, skimpy and disjointed, and the third falls back on Mr. Macken’s old and apparently abandoned resource – physical violence.’

*The Irish Press* reviewer praised the theme handled ‘admirably’ by Macken, but lacking his ‘customary sparkle’. While in the ‘Gombeen man’ he considered Macken ‘has created a brilliant character who really gives the play its backbone’.

*The Irish Independent*, though praising Macken’s thoughtfulness as a writer, questioned the plausibility of the situation presented in the play and ‘in spite of a sometimes annoying repetitiousness it is all very disarming’.

Extracts from the reviews are in **Appendix 4.11**.

An interesting aside about the Queen’s Theatre as a venue appears in the Abbey minute book on 2 April and reflects directly on the failure of *Look in the Looking Glass*. Blythe

was reporting on seeing Hugh Leonard's *Madigan's Lock* which opened in the Gate Theatre on 25 March 1958.

There was something like a three-quarter house and it was clear that the play would have failed at the Queen's more or less as Macken's play did.

The filming of *Home is the Hero* started in spring 1958 and with a number of Abbey actors cast in the film, the matter became an item of interest to the Abbey Board. This was reported on by Blythe also on 2 April. He told the Board the casting was almost complete and the filming was to start shortly. 'An American named Kennedy who is said to be extremely good will take the part of Willie.'

Blythe continues to give the Board members updates on progress with the filming at subsequent meetings.

Walter Macken appeared in two full length films<sup>94, 95</sup>. The first was the film of his play *Home is the Hero* in which he played Paddo. In the second he played Warder Regan in the film of *The Quare Fellow* by Brendan Behan. *The Quare Fellow* was made in 1962. Both films were made in Ireland.

By the end of May 1958 filming of *Home is the Hero* was reported by Blythe as almost completed '... and everyone is of the opinion that it will be extremely good...' The Director was Fielder Cook and the screen play was by Henry Keating.

*Home is the Hero* was made in Ardmore Studios and on location in Ireland. It opened in April 1959 and Macken was widely praised for his performance.

Tom Hennigan, in *The Sunday Press* 26, April 1959, page 19, wrote under the heading 'Walter Macken Triumphs: Walter Macken's Paddo will surely rank as one of the greatest characterisations the screen has given us ....'

**Appendix 4.16** contains this review as well as details on the cast and credits.

The Irish reviews were in marked contrast with the mixed review the film received when released in the USA. In the main the America reviews were positive. The clear exception was the *New York Times*.<sup>96</sup>

*Home Is the Hero* opened at the Fifth Avenue Cinema, New York in January 1961. The New York Times review by Bosley Crowther was published in on the 26 January 1961. The full review is attached as **Appendix 4.17**.

On Macken performance as Paddo, the father, Crowther writes:

The father is an irredeemable donkey, deserving of no sympathy. Then why should anybody be concerned with or affected by him?

In real life, there might be some reason. But Mr. Macken has failed in his play - and Henry Keating has failed in his screen play - to clarify it and give it a point. There is no sense of benighted background, of the cruel grip of poverty or any other peculiar circumstances that have affected these people's fates.

*The New York Post*<sup>97</sup> review by Archer Winsten, also dated 26 January, could be thought to be a review of different film. The review refers very positively to the performers and the performances, all "like John Millington Synge characters". The full review is in **Appendix 4.18** and the final paragraph read:

This is one of the fine, serious films of the period. It fights and wrestles its subject down to the ground, and you feel it.

The picture has a much stronger effect than the play seemed to have, even after making allowances for the severity of the theatre critics and the comparatively sweet disposition of those who review movies as a profession.

The New York Post also carried the following advertisement for the film.

Picture 4.34



It appears that Emmet Dalton, Emmet Dalton Productions, responsible for making the film, *Home is the Hero*, wanted Macken to play in his next film, an adaptation of George Shiels' *New Gossoon* but Macken was not willing to take the part. (28 May 1958)

The BBC continued their interest in Macken's work with *Home is the Hero* as their Sunday - Night Theatre presentation on 27 July 1958. **Picture 4.35**

RADIO TIMES

**PROGRAMMES** **JULY 27**

AY. EVENING



EDDIE BYRNE AND PEGGY MARSHALL

**SUNDAY-NIGHT THEATRE**

PRESENTS

*Eddie Byrne*

IN

**'HOME IS THE HERO'**

BY

*Walter Macken*

CAST

Freddy O'Reilly.....Eddie Byrne  
Dayla, his wife.....PEGGY MARSHALL  
Willie, his son.....DONAL DONNELLY  
Josie, his daughter.....CONCEPTEA PENNELL  
Doverell, the tenant.....PATRICK MCALINDY  
Bid, his wife.....CARMEL MCSHARRY  
Mrs. Green.....SHILA WARD  
Lily Green, her daughter.....JOAN PHILLIPS  
Trepper O'Reilly.....GERALD C. LAWSON  
Manchester Monaghan.....JOHN CARBON

DESIGNED, RICHARD KERRY

PRODUCED BY

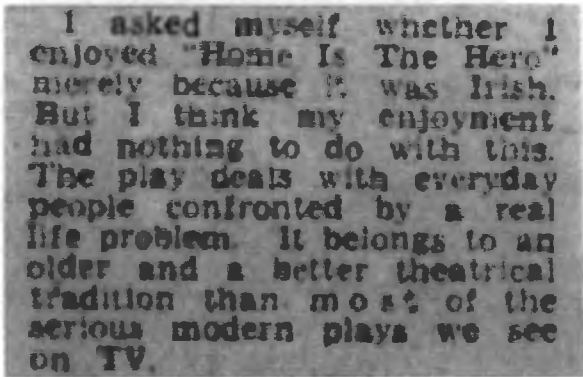
*John Jacobs*

The action takes place in the town of Galway, Ireland. Times, the present

AT 8.0

In his review of the TV production in *The Sunday Independent* on the 3 August Denis McGrath wrote positively about the programme. Though critical of the adaptation, the number of exits and entrances, he was impressed with the performances. In paragraph 4 he wonders about a possible bias:

Picture 4.36



*Look in the Looking Glass* was presented in Scotland by the Citizen's Theatre, Glasgow in November 1958<sup>98</sup>. The play opened on the 25 November with the following cast:

Picture 4.37

### "LOOK IN THE LOOKING GLASS"

A Comedy by WALTER MACKEN

**CAST**

PETER MORAN .....	Harry Walker
MARY (his wife) .....	Janet Michael
MICK (his son) .....	John Grieve
JANEY .....	Annette Crobie
SARAH STEVENS .....	Edith Macarthur
CAPTAIN O'FLAHERTY .....	Joseph Brady
STUTTER COLLINS .....	Iain Cuthbertson
SIVERN (his daughter) .....	Irene Sinters
TERENCE O'CONNOR .....	Ewan Hooper
CHRISTIE MURPHY .....	Martin Heller

The Play directed by PETER DUGUID

Seting designed by DOUGLAS ABERCROMBIE

The play takes place in the village of "Chaddism" in the West of Ireland, and the action is continuous.

Time--The Present.

There will be two intervals of 12 minutes each.

At the Piano--ARTHUR BLAKE

Wigs by A. & A. Wigs, Ltd., Edinburgh.  
Nylon Stockings by TAYLOR-WOODS, London.  
Olivier Cigarettes by BENSON AND HEDGES.  
Costumes laundered exclusively in FAIRY SNOW.  
Willow Pattern China kindly loaned by ROBIN HOOD GIFT SHOP, Glasgow.

Stage Director - +	ROBIN LODGE-MORGAN
Stage Manager -	RICHARD McNEILL
Asst. Stage Managers -	ANNE KRISTEN
	JOSEPH BRADY
	JANEY MICHAEL
	JAMES McCREADIE
Master Carpenter -	GEORGE SULLIVAN
Electrician -	MICHAEL THOMPSON
Lighting Operator -	DOROTHY MARSHALL
Wardrobe -	SALLY TROTTER
Scenery Painted by +	DAVID JONES
	DOUGLAS ABERCROMBIE

The play was reviewed on the 26 November by *The Scotsman*, *The Glasgow Herald* and the *Evening Citizen*. They all saw the production as a light evening's entertainment at best. *The Scotsman* likened it to '...rustic, gossamer-light comedy', while the *Glasgow Herald* reviewer wrote towards the end of the review

The most disappointing thing... is probably Mr. Macken's language, which like the padding Mr. Cuthbertson wears to fill out his figure, sags most alarmingly in the course of the evening. But no doubt it is wrong to demand too much. There is plenty of action (free fights and much stage whiskey drunk, and a riot outside) and there are jokes enough to keep things cheerful....

Robert Hewitt for the *Evening Citizen* used the headline 'CITIZENS' CAST LOVES THIS IRISH LARK' concluded his review with this paragraph.

Look in the Looking Glass is more a ploy than a play. Slow in opening, it loses far too much pace in the last act. But it has this benefit: the actors obviously are enjoying playing in this earthy Irish lark....

In the last years of the 1950s' Macken had started work on what was to become his historical trilogy. The first of this three book series, *Seek the Fair Land* was published by Macmillan and Co. Ltd in 1959 (Footnote 4.6) and became the Literary Guild selection in the USA for August (Macken 2009, 357). He was also continuing to write for the theatre and in 1960 his new play *The Voices of Doolin* was performed at the Dublin Theatre Festival.

*The Voices of Doolin*<sup>99</sup> received its professional production from Cyril Cusack Productions and played at the Gaiety Theatre. The opening night was 15 September 1960 with Cyril Cusack playing the lead, Doolin the doll maker.

**Footnote 4.6:** Macken's widely acclaimed historical trilogy was based on three major events in Irish history. *Seek the Fair Land*, set in 1649 covered the Cromwellian invasion, *The Silent People* (1962), the period from 1826 until the famine and *The Scorching Wind* (1964) the period from 1915 to the Irish civil war.

The Wuppertal archive contains one handwritten script, a typed script and the script adapted for radio by Philip Rooney.

The writing of the play must have started sometime towards the end of 1958. A sketch of the set by Macken accompanying the handwritten script is dated 28 January 1959 (Appendix 4.19).

The play received very poor reviews (Appendix 4.11).

*The Irish Times* reviewer did not like the play, described as ‘a rambling tract on the evils of alcoholism ...’ (K)

*The Irish Press*, greatly taken by the character, Doolin, commented that

Despite its many weaknesses, the play is a success because the character of Doolin is drawn with such splendid strokes that it fills Mr. Macken’s stage canvas to the dwarfing of much that is trivial, if not naive.

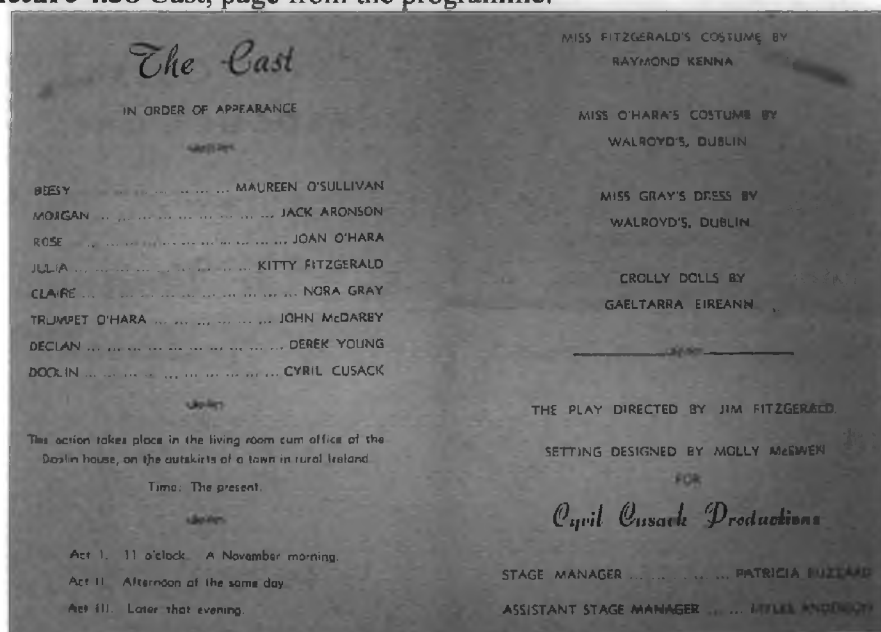
Mr. Macken has not any finer writing than in the creation of Doolin and Cyril Cusack has seldom acted more impressively ... (MM)

*The Irish Independent* confirmed that the play was written ‘especially for Cyril Cusack’. Commenting on the story of Doolin, an alcoholic, and his struggle to rehabilitate himself, it reported the build-up to this crisis ‘cumbersome and flagging and allows the pace to slacken to the danger point’.

Without doubt the play was seen as a vehicle that allowed Cyril Cusack to use his full range of theatrical skills and it was this performance that made the play acceptable.



Picture 4.38 Cast, page from the programme.



Radio Eireann expressed an interest to present a radio version of *The Voices of Doolin* at the end of the year and by January 1961 rehearsals for the radio play were agreed. The schedule for the broadcast confirmed that Cyril Cusack played the doll-maker, Doolin, and Walter Macken played the 'efficiency expert', Cumisky. The programme was adapted for radio by Philip Rooney and produced by Seamus Breathnach. It was aired on 19 March 1961 with a repeat broadcast on 29 October 1961<sup>100</sup>.

During November 1961 Blythe raised with Ria Mooney the advisability of a revival of *The King of Friday's Men*. She was doubtful about the prospects of success. The play ran for 8 weeks in 1948 and in 1949 for 3½ weeks. At the Queens in July 1952 it did badly and Blythe, attempting an explanation for that failure, wrote 'that may have been due to the fact that the people were disappointed with the cast,' without Macken as Bartley 'the play lost a great deal.' Mentioning Macken for the part again he told the Abbey Board:

Macken himself is older and not quite so suitable for the part as he was ten years ago.... I think it would be a bad thing to give a very high fee to Walter Macken. Though he was magnificent as Bartley Dowd he is no great actor and everybody here knows it .... Of course he might be willing to come for something reasonable

because an appearance might still have show-window value for him. In that case I think that his re-appearance in the cast would stimulate interest in *The King of Friday's Men* (28 November 1961)

This proposed revival never happened.

At 27 March 1962 Board meeting Blythe returned this time to a revival of *Home is the Hero* and that he 'should be inclined at least to get a contract [with Macken]' The Board agreed that Macken should be asked to sign a contract for *Home is the Hero*. Macken was agreeable to this request and told Blythe '...that Macmillan's handled all his work.'

Tomás McCann [sic] was in charge of the revival of *Home is the Hero* and by October the play was ready. The Manager reported on 23 October 1962 that the play drew very small houses. It was withdrawn after 3 nights. The reason for this should have been obvious to anyone paying any attention to the other entertainments being provided in Dublin at the time.

The picture [*Home is the Hero*] is still going the rounds and was on in Westland Row last week. I shall tell that to Walter Macken that we had not anticipated this and are sorry to have been obliged to take the play off so quickly.

On 6 November Blythe report to the Directors:

I did not realise that the film had been as much round Dublin as it actually was ... and it would be running in a picture house not a quarter of a mile away.

Walter Macken's second film was the Arthur Dreifuss version of *The Quare Fellow*. It was made in 1962 at Ardmore Studios and locations in Ireland. The screen adaptation was by Arthur Dreifuss and Jacqueline Sundstrom and it was based on the play by Brendan Behan. It starred the English actors Patrick McGoohan and Sylvia Syms, with

many of the other parts performed by Abbey actors. Macken played the older warder, Regan.

The film of the *The Quare Fellow* was not a success. It received very mixed reviews that appeared to reflect more the expectation that a film of the Behan play would be true to the original script rather than the need that film, with a far wider audience, takes into account box-office pressures and the diversity of that audience.

Some of the reviewers, hankering after the ‘anti capital punishment’ message of the play, condemned the film. Others, perhaps showing an understanding that film is a medium with a wider entertainment focus, were not looking for a carbon copy of the Behan play.

The film was reviewed widely and some of these diverse views are reflected in the following extracts. Macken’s performance was also commented on by some of the reviewers. Extracts from a few of the reviews are below and others are reproduced in

#### **Appendix 4.20**

*The Irish Independent* report, on 22 September 1962, pre-viewing the film questioned the name change from the original play title *The Quare Fella* and went on to write ‘The original has been spiced up very much, and according to the synopsis of the screen story, little of Brendan Behan’s play remains except the basic idea.’

*The Evening Herald* reviewer on 29 September 1962 wrote:

The long-awaited screen version of *The Quare Fella*, Brendan Behan’s critical attack on capital punishment, is here at last, but let me say straight away that for the sake of the future of the Irish film industry it would have been better had it never been undertaken.

*The Irish Catholic* in an undated review concluded the film to be ‘A very poor film, a very poor piece of “stage Irish nonsense”.’ On Macken’s performance the reviewer did

write: 'Only Walter Macken impresses. He is the only really sympathetic role. His is the only real piece of acting.'

*The Sunday Press* reviewer on 30 September admitted:

During the week I had another look at it and my opinion remains the same, a wonderful play spoiled as a film by keeping too much of an eye on the box-office. Sylvia Sims reduces the level of both the script and the play to absurdity, which is redeemed by Patrick McGoochan and Walter Macken.

Dilys Powell writing in *The Sunday Times* reports that with the adaptation '... the skeleton of the story is the same .... And the argument against capital punishment is the same. But it is weakened by scenes in the outside world....' The young warder is well played by Patrick McGoochan while Walter Macken '...as the older warder: the unforgettable face of experience.'

*The Irish Press* on 1 October described Macken's performance as 'an accomplished piece of acting.' And concluded, that in marked contrast to *The Evening Press* report (see **Appendix 4.20**) and 'despite its flaws, *The Quare Fella*, is a sincere piece of work, thoughtful, and at times, very moving. I recommend it highly.' (**Footnote 4.7**)

In a letter to his son, Wallyóg, now Fr. Walter, dated 1 January 1963, Macken mentions the film.

*The Quare Fellow* is not a good film. It could have been a sort of good documentary, an anti-capital punishment film but they made a mess of it introducing unnecessary material to 'improve it'. The Director was not good – he wouldn't listen to advice from anybody – but I liked my part and carried on despite everything. (Macken, 2009, 394)

**Footnote 4.7:** *The Quare Fellow* and *Home is the Hero* are available to view, by appointment, at the Irish Film Institute (IFI), [www.irishfilms.ie](http://www.irishfilms.ie). *The Quare Fellow* is also available on Kino International DVD, [www.kino.com](http://www.kino.com).

Walter Macken continued to write plays into the 1960s. The Abbey minute book records on the 26 February 1963 that

Walter Macken, due to an intervention by Dr. Wilmot has sent us a new play. I have not had time to complete reading it but I notice with pleasure that Walter has now dropped the gimmick to which he stuck for so long and which seemed to me to have been a definite handicap to him in writing all the plays he has written since he used it successfully in *Mungo's Mansion*. It required that the action of the play should take place during the period of time required for its performance on the stage and that the interval should be merely arbitrary breaks to enable members of the audience to stretch their legs. His new piece has an act in the morning, another in the afternoon and another at night.

A decision on the play was not made until 18 June when the Board agreed that it be 'returned' by Mr. Blythe to the author.

The play was *Merchant's Road* and the manuscript<sup>101</sup> is dated 22 February 1963. This is a re-worked version of an earlier play, possibly written in 1960, called *The Last Gentleman*<sup>102</sup>. The story lines are identical and both plays are discussed in Chapter 6.

Interestingly, Macken in his *Irish Independent* interview on the 1 July 1965 published in the Tatler's column (page 6) that announced his appointment to the Abbey Board, mentions *The Last Gentleman* as '... now completed with Cyril Cusack specifically in mind.' (See **Appendix 5.1** and Chapter 5)

## **Macken plays performed beyond the theatre world of Ireland, the UK or America**

For Irish playwrights success is first measured by the responses to their work from home audiences. After that they may look for success in the West End theatres of London but their measure of real success is a successful run on Broadway. Performances in other countries appear to be viewed as a novelty or indeed a curiosity with little attention paid to them by the playwright or our theatre columnists. The assumption at the time must have been that only English speakers would be interested in plays from Ireland. It is still curious to consider that the audiences in countries with rich theatre histories and world-class playwrights could be so thoughtlessly ignored as having no interest in Irish plays.

Walter Macken was no different in this respect to the other Irish playwrights of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century. The main attraction of Broadway performances, successful or otherwise, was the possibility of the work, the author or the performers being ‘discovered’ and offered a lucrative contract by one of the Hollywood studios.

We have a glimpse of this attitude to non-English languages performances in Macken’s letter to Richard Fox in 1947. In that letter the last lines of page 1 read:

I have signed a 6 year contract for the production of *Mungo’s Mansion* in Flemish in Holland and Belgium. It would be fun to hear what they make of the Galway accent in the Low-Countries.... (Appendix 2.10)

Yet Macken’s plays went further a field and with some measure of success. It is reasonable to assume that these performances passed unheeded in Ireland and received no attention from theatre critics or those writing on theatre matters in Ireland.

We can accept the evidence of Macken’s own words that *Mungo’s Mansion* came to the attention of theatre people in the Flemish regions in Belgium and Holland. Unfortunately, contact with the ‘Vlaams Theater Instituut’ (Flemish Theatre Institute)<sup>103</sup> and the

Netherlands Theatre Institute (TIN) <sup>104</sup> resulted in no confirmation that the Macken play was performed in either country. Perhaps, this is understandable when we consider that both countries were recovering after the end of World War 2 that had ended two years earlier.

The other interests in Macken's plays during the 1950s were from Australia, Germany, Norway and Sweden.

### **Australia:**

The National Library of Australia <sup>105</sup> proved a useful resource in tracking down the performances of Macken's plays on Australian radio and by theatre companies.

The National Film and Sound Archives <sup>106</sup> confirmed that *Home is the Hero* was broadcast 'circa 1952'. The message from the librarian, Peter Kunz, confirmed this and that it was also broadcast for radio 2UE in Harry Dearth's Playhouse c. 1961. (Footnote 4.8)

Considering that the first performance of *Home is the Hero* in Ireland was in July 1952 it is possible that the Australians were able to acquire a script that year and that a radio script was prepared in sufficient time for a broadcast in 1952. Peter Kunz mention of 'circa 1952' could imply that the actual broadcast was the following year. The broadcast was by the Macquarie Broadcasting Services (Caltex Theatre). Even if the broadcast were in 1953 then this Australian broadcast was the first overseas presentation of the work and was the likely catalyst for the theatre performances that followed.

**Footnote 4.8:** Peter Kunz in his reply stated "The number of the script is C 151 and our catalogue mentions that scripts C 127-131 and C 214-218 were aired circa 1952. As the script falls within that number range I assume that the most approximate date which I can deduce is 'circa 1952'".

The Maitland Repertory Society, New South Wales <sup>107</sup>, an amateur group formed in 1947, performed, with Arts Council of Australia support, *Home is the Hero* in August 1956.

**Picture 4.39**



The Society were able to provide me with this paper-cutting and one other, both undated, and thought to have been from their local paper, *The Maitland Mercury*. They also sent a copy of the programme, see **Appendix 4.21** for the front page.

*Mungo's Mansion* was performed as part of the Festival of Perth, in January 1957. The venue was the Somerville Auditorium and the director is described as the Adult Education Board and the National Theatre <sup>108</sup>. The producer was Sol Sainken and the principal performers were James Kemp and Bernadette Pratley (**Footnote 4.9**).

The National Library also searched for references to Walter Macken's plays possibly done by the Old Tote Theatre Company. This Company, established in 1963, was originally the standing company for the National Institute of Dramatic Art and precursor to the Sydney Theatre Company. Correspondence exists between Macmillan and Co and the Old Tote Company and the National Library confirmed after consulting the Old Tote Company illustrated history and the programme collection that the Company did not perform any of Macken's plays.

**Footnote 4.9:** The librarian, Julianne Clifford, for the Information Services of the State Library of Western Australia searched the two main local newspapers - the *West Australian* and the *Sunday Times* for January 1957 and found an advertisement for the performance which stated the performance dates as 22 – 31 January.



Macken may have other correspondence with the Old Tote Company. After his resignation from his Abbey positions in the summer of 1966 he received a belated congratulatory letter from Joe MacColm of the Company. This letter <sup>109</sup> dated the 15 July 1966 was addressed to him as Artistic Director at the Abbey Theatre and greeted him as “Dear Wally”, and hoped that his return may ‘mean a great new-birth and be the opening to long and exciting years of endeavour and great success.’

### **Germany:**

In 1955, *Home is the Hero* attracted the attention of the Hamburger Kammerspiele in Germany <sup>110</sup> and their production of the play was performed in May. Correspondence with the theatre’s current Geschäftsführer, Holger Zebu Kluth, confirmed that there are no records held in the theatre on past performances.

Since the organisation that runs the theatre changed several times, there is nothing to be found. (Message from Herr Kluth dated 26 February 2008)

Fortunately, the Wuppertal archive contains a copy of the play programme <sup>111</sup> and a range of paper-cutting from a number of German newspapers.

The *Hamburger Abendblatt* and *Die Welt* <sup>112</sup> provide full accounts of the production. A summary of the *Abendblatt* report with photograph gives an indication of how the German audience received the play. *Die Welt* report on the 28 April 1955 appears under the banner “Ein kleinbürgerliches Trauerspiel” (A Petty Bourgeois Tragedy).

*Die Zeit* <sup>113</sup> also covered the event a short time later and this gave the reporter an opportunity to compare the stage play with a TV presentation of the play coinciding with the Kammerspiele performance.



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Deutsch von Elisabeth Schnack

Inszenierung: Ida Ehre • Bühnenbild: Heinz Hoffmann

Musik: Roland Sander-Macken

Paddy O'Reilly .....	Georg Mask-Calmeg
Daylla, seine Frau .....	Elis Waldeck
Willie, sein Sohn .....	Günter Hottmann
John, seine Tochter .....	Wolke Fjorne
Trapper O'Hylan .....	Klaus Neugass
Dorettal, Unterwister .....	Helmut Peine
Bil, seine Frau .....	Ilva Fiebig
Mrs. Green .....	Mita von Ahlefeld
Lily Green, ihre Tochter .....	Irene Natharius
Manchener Monaghan .....	Werner Schumacher

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*Die Zeit* report commented on the TV production of *Home is the Hero* directed by Leo Mittler and contrasted this with the stage version by Ida Ehre in Hamburg. Both Ehre and Mittler were prominent members of the German and Austrian theatre and film communities in the mid-1950s' (Footnote 4.10, next page). The writer remarked on the

opportunity provided to ‘watch a new dramatic work in Germany in two different forms of presentation: on the stage and on television’ describing the work as a ‘poetically powerful and realistic three-act play.’

Ida Ehre put it on stage as a German first night performance in her theatre in Hamburg under the name *Five Years After*. Only a few days later the producer Leo Mittler presented the play on the TV station NWDR under the name *Home-coming of a Hero* which gets closer to the irony of the original title. This coincidence shows the advantages TV studios have over theatre stages as well as the disadvantages.

The report outlines the story-line and describes the play as

...a condensed play that only for moments explodes into violence. Compared to today's habits in theatre it is almost too quiet. It is for this reason that Ida Ehre over-emphasised the violence... This may be her understanding of Irish temperament but does not necessarily correspond with the intentions of the writer.

Nevertheless the performance was intelligently arranged and striking.

**Footnote 4.10:** Ida Ehre received her training as an actor at the University of Music and Performing Arts, Vienna. She made her acting debut at the Stadttheater in Bielitz (Poland) and appeared in theatres in Budapest, Cottbus, Bonn, Königsberg, Stuttgart and at the Nationaltheater Mannheim. From 1930, she appeared at the Lessingtheater in Berlin. She opened the Hamburger Kammerspiele theatre after the war in December 1945. In addition to modern German drama such as Wolfgang Borchert's *The Man Outside* (German: *Draußen vor der Tür*), she brought modern pieces by playwrights from other countries for the first time in Germany, including plays by Jean Anouilh, T. S. Eliot, Jean Giraudoux, Jean-Paul Sartre and Thornton Wilder. In 1971, she won the Schillerpreis der Stadt Mannheim. In 1984, she became the first woman honorary citizen of Hamburg and in the same year she received the Silberne Blatt of the Dramatiker Union. She received an honorary doctorate from the University of Hamburg. She managed the theatre until her death in 1989. (in part from [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ida\\_Ehre](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ida_Ehre))

**Leo Mittler** was a prominent film director and script writer who also received his training at the University of Music and Performing Arts in Vienna. Born in Vienna in December 1883 his early important contribution was the social criticism film *Jenseits der Straße* for Prometheus Film in 1929. He went to Paris in 1930 and directed for Paramount. He emigrated to England and on to the USA and worked there as a scriptwriter from 1939 to 1948. He returned to theatre work in Germany and Austria and also worked for West German Television. He died in West Berlin in May 1958. Most of his films were made in the 1920's and 1930s and amongst his work for German TV was Walter Macken's *Heimkehr des Helden* in 1955. (This summary translated from [http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leo\\_Mittler](http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leo_Mittler) and other facts are from <http://www.kinotv.eu/page/bio.php?namecode=70623>)

The German rights for *Home is the Hero* were assigned to Mrs. Liesl Frank Mittler, see letter from Ruth May dated 5 November 1954 (BUW Folder 61) and letter from Macmillan 23 May 1955 (BUW Folder 62).

The final *Die Zeit* paragraph mentions the different possibilities available to the TV directors.

May be it is due to the nature of the play or the possibilities of creating a more intimate atmosphere available to TV productions that the TV performance had a much more delicate and intellectual touch than the theatre play. A camera can produce a greater closeness between actor and observer by showing the performer on the whole screen.

It also mentions the advantage of using several cameras but that the TV production lost out on colour (black and white) and 'spatiality'. Finally, the writer makes the point that 'the publicity for a TV production is always greater even for often repeated play.'

A similar article appeared in *Der Spiegel* on the 11 May 1955 on pages 46 and 47 under the heading: Trauerspiel in der Wohnküche (Tragedy in the Kitchen). Again the TV and Hamburg productions were discussed.

**Picture 4.41** is taken from the *Der Spiegel* article.



**Appendix 4.24** reproduces the original *Die Zeit* and *Der Spiegel* reports.

In 1957 *Home is the Hero* as *Heimkehr des Helden* (*Home coming of the Hero*) was played in Dortmund and possibly at other venues close-by. Reports on the play appeared in the *Westphalenpost* (Hagen) on the 7 March, the *Ruhr-Nachrichten* on the 4 March and the *Wuppertal Rundschau*, also on the 4 March.

#### Norway:

*Heimkommen helt* (*Home is the Hero*) had what appeared to be a very successful run throughout Norway in 1956. It was presented by Det Norske Teatret and there were 40 performances in Oslo and 60 on tour to other Norwegian cities. The opening night was 7 November.

**Picture 4.42** shows the set and most of the cast and makes an interesting comparison with the set and the costumes used in the play's unsuccessful Broadway production in 1954.



This photograph, supplied from Det Norske Teatret <sup>114</sup> archive, shows: from left to right, Trapper, Lily, Daylia, Paddo, Dovetail, Willie and Bid. A second photograph from the production, a copy of cast from the play programme and a press-cutting are in **Appendix 4.25**.

Department of Theatre History at The National Library in Oslo supplied me with a copy of the play programme and five press-cuttings on the production. The press-cuttings were from *Aftenposten*, *Arbeiderbladet*, *Dagbladet*, *Morgenbladet* and *VG Uerdens Gang*. The cuttings were all undated except the *Aftenposten*, dated 8 November 1956. These reports were detailed and included photographs and line drawings **Pictures 4.43(a) and (b)**.

**Picture 4.43(a)**



*VG Uerdens Gang*

**Picture 4.43(b)**



The Macken archive in Wuppertal (Folder 62) has synopses of five reports from Norwegian newspapers. The reports from *Arbeiderbladet* and *Morgenbladet* give the dates as 9 and 8 November 1956. The synopses are in **Appendix 4.26**.

Macmillan's in their letter dated 13 March 1958 <sup>115</sup> to Macken reported 'We have just received about £130 for royalties on another Norwegian run of *Home is the Hero* in Oslo in November and December. These Scandinavians are obviously discerning people.' There appears to be no further information on this production.

#### Sweden:

*Home is the Hero* (Hjälten kommer hem) was presented by the Riksteatern in February 1954. Press cuttings <sup>116</sup> from *Dagens Nyheter*, *Aftonbladet* and *Svenska Dagbladet* are all dated 24 February 1954. The copies are in **Appendix 4.27**.

**Picture 4.44** The picture from the *Aftonbladet* shows Carl Ström as Paddo and Stina Stähle as Daylia.



It is possible that the play may have been toured and **Picture 4.45** shows that *Home is the Hero* was presentation in the Stadsteater Uppsala on the 19 April and in Stadsteater Gävle on the 27 April 1954. The press cuttings from the earlier productions indicate that there were cast changes from the February production though Paddo continued to be played by Carl Ström.

**Picture 4.45** The cast page from the programme for the Uppsala and Gävle performances.



A report on the Uppsala production appeared in the *Stockholms-Tidningen* on the 20 April 1954, **Appendix 4.28**.

This report mentions that this is the second Irish play recently performed in the theatre. The earlier one was Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* that had opened just after Christmas 1953.

The report gave a brief account of Macken's background and described the play as 'truly original'. Martin Strömberg, the reviewer, compared Paddo, 'the Hero in the play' with Christy Mahon the hero in *The Playboy of the Western World*, 'a killer and a braggart',



mentioning that Irish writers ‘like these kinds of characters’, that they [the characters] have a ‘sort of freedom that makes your imagination stir and makes those people that are easily moved to admire them’.

Carl Ström, who played Paddo had also played Christy in *The Playboy* 25 years earlier and he was ‘much tougher, more powerful and authoritative’ in this role. In describing the action of the play he saw Paddo as having ‘nothing learnt and nothing forgotten during his time in prison’. Now Paddo can ‘handle his wife ...but the children he cannot handle’ and in the end he ‘walks away a lonely man’. The reviewer makes the interesting observation that the play should end after Paddo’s final exit. He wrote that the remaining scenes ‘... are of no importance and should have been deleted.’

Over all he liked the performances, the direction and the set, described as a kitchen interior.

**Picture 4.46(a)** Dovetail (Hans Strååt), the welcome home for Paddo.



**Picture 4.46(b)** Willie (Bengt Brunskog) and Paddo (Carl Ström)



Credit: Uppsala Bild

The *Svenska Dagbladet* in their section on ‘Theater Musik och Film’ also reported on the play on the 20 April 1954 with the head-line ‘Irlandskt Folkliv i Uppsala’.<sup>117</sup>

1958 saw the Swedish production of *Twilight of a Warrior* also by the Riksteatern. The play, named in Swedish *Du stolte krigare*, was toured in Sweden from the 20 February until the 15 April 1958. The first performance was in Eskilstuna, over 100 km South-West of Stockholm on 20 February, **Appendix 4.29** (the reviews).

Maud Forsman, Produktionskontoret from the Riksteatern <sup>118</sup> explained the circumstances in a message on the 29 February 2008.

It was performed by Riksteatern and Riksteatern (**Footnote 4.11**) is a touring company that celebrates 75 years this year.

*Du stolte krigare* must have been performed all around the country, from South to North. Unfortunately I can't tell you exactly where; we don't keep archives in that way. At that time I think it could have been something like 40-50 performances. Maybe they played 4 or 5 in one town and in other places only one. The rules concerning working hours were rather different at that time. I don't know if they performed in Stockholm. That has changed a lot during the years. We have a commissioned from the Government to perform in places that are too small for having their own theatre.

**Footnote 4.11:** Riksteatern is the name of the popular 'National Touring Theatre'/ National Theatre Company" in Sweden. It's the biggest theatre company on tour in Sweden and can, in one way, almost be described as Sweden's national stage on tour. Riksteatern is financed and owned by 240 local economic associations throughout Sweden and the goal is to promote and produce quality theatre for all of Sweden, outside the city regions. Riksteatern was established in 1933 and has been on-tour all over Sweden since.

Picture 4.44: Programme for the Riksteatern production <sup>119</sup>



The Swedish Theatre Museum also has a manuscript of the play *Mungo's Mansion* adapted for radio and dated 1949. They do not know if it was ever broadcast. The radio script is named *Mungos hus. Ett skådespel om livet i Galway* and before my contacts with them they had no knowledge of the English title.

## References:

- <sup>71</sup> BUW Folder 48 contains Plymouth Theatre, Boston, original play programme.
- <sup>72</sup> Internet Broadway Data Base, <http://www.ibdb.com/production.php?id=1925>
- <sup>73</sup> Private papers of Ultan Macken
- <sup>74</sup> Ó hAodha, Micheál. *Siobhan: A Memoir of an Actress*. Dingle, Ireland: Brandon Book Publishers Ltd, 1994, page 32
- <sup>75</sup> BUW Folder 15
- <sup>76</sup> Radio Review, for week ending 31 October 1952
- <sup>77</sup> Undated letter to Walter Macken in early June 1953 (Personal Papers of Ultan Macken)
- <sup>78</sup> BUW Folder 57
- <sup>79</sup> BUW Folder 56
- <sup>80</sup> Internet Broadway Data Base, <http://www.ibdb.com/production.asp?ID=2458>
- <sup>81</sup> BUW Folder 56
- <sup>82</sup> Angelin, Patricia, Robert G. Lowery, ed. *My Very Dear Sean, George Jean Nathan to Sean O'Casey, Letters and Articles*. New Jersey: Associated University Press, 1985 p.115
- <sup>83</sup> Macken, Walter. *Home is the Hero*. London: Macmillan and Co. Ltd. 1953
- <sup>84</sup> BUW Folder 57
- <sup>85</sup> The O'Casey papers, National Library of Ireland, MS 38,060/1

- <sup>86</sup> Krause, David. ed. *The Letters of Sean O'Casey 1942-1954*, Volume II. New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc. 1980. (Pages 1127-1129)
- <sup>87</sup> Murray, Christopher. *Seán O'Casey, Writer at Work. A Biography*. Dublin: Gill and Macmillan Ltd, 2004, (Page 357)
- <sup>88</sup> BUW Folder 15
- <sup>89</sup> Krause, David. ed. *The Letters of Sean O'Casey 1955-1988*, Volume III. New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc. 1989, page 205
- <sup>90</sup> BUW Folder 57
- <sup>91</sup> BUW Folder 41
- <sup>92</sup> BUW Folder 16
- <sup>93</sup> BUW Folder 16
- <sup>94</sup> Rocket, Kevin. *The Irish Filmography*, Dunlaoghaire: Red Mountain Maedia Ltd., 1996
- <sup>95</sup> Rocket, Kevin, Luke Gibbons and John Hill. *Cinema and Ireland*, London: Routledge, 1988
- <sup>96</sup> New York Times website: <http://movies2.nytimes.com/mem/movies/review.html?>
- <sup>97</sup> BUW Folder 57
- <sup>98</sup> BUW Folder 16 and Folder 40
- <sup>99</sup> BUW Folders 40 and 41
- <sup>100</sup> Information provided by Eibhlín Ní Oisín, Information Manager, RTE Reference Library, RTE, Dublin 4 and sourced from [www.irishnewsarchive.com/](http://www.irishnewsarchive.com/)
- <sup>101</sup> BUW Manuscript Nr. 60
- <sup>102</sup> BUW Manuscript Nr. 57
- <sup>103</sup> Vlaams Theater Instituut, Steunpunt voor de Podiumkunsten van de Vlaamse, Gemeenschap, Sainctelettesquare 19, 1000 Brussels, Belgium, [www.vti.be](http://www.vti.be)
- <sup>104</sup> Netherlands Theatre Institute (TIN), [www.theaterinstituut.nl](http://www.theaterinstituut.nl)
- <sup>105</sup> National Library of Australia: [www.nla.gov.au/](http://www.nla.gov.au/)
- <sup>106</sup> National Film and Sound Archives: <http://reftracker.nla.gov.au/default.aspx?mi=fmxPqQ>
- <sup>107</sup> Maitland Repertory Society: [www.maitlandrepertory.com](http://www.maitlandrepertory.com)
- <sup>108</sup> State Library of Western Australia: <http://tinyurl.com/yhxr348>
- <sup>109</sup> BUW, Folder 16
- <sup>110</sup> Hamburger Kammerspiele at [www.hamburger-kammerspiele.de](http://www.hamburger-kammerspiele.de)
- <sup>111</sup> BUW Folder 56
- <sup>112</sup> BUW Folder 57 (For all the 1955 German paper cuttings for *Home is the Hero*)
- <sup>113</sup> Die Zeit: <http://www.zeit.de/1955/20/Buehne-und-Studio-in-Konkurrenz>
- <sup>114</sup> I am grateful to Ms. Trine Næss, the Department of Theatre History at The National Library in Oslo for her assistance, to Heidi Lindstad, Archivist, Det Norske Teatret for the three images and also to the Royal Norwegian Embassy, Dublin
- <sup>115</sup> BUW Folder 62, letter to Walter Macken from Macmillan and Co Ltd dated 13 March 1958.
- <sup>116</sup> Marianne Seid, archivist, Sveriges Teatermuseum (Theatre Museum of Sweden)
- <sup>117</sup> BUW Folder 57
- <sup>118</sup> [www.Riksteatern.se](http://www.Riksteatern.se), (Available in English)
- <sup>119</sup> BUW Folder 41

## Chapter 5

### **The Abbey Board Member, Assistant Manager and Artistic Adviser**

Following the C. S. Andrews enquiry in 1964 (**Footnote 5.1**) into the working terms and conditions of the Abbey players, the Minister of Finance, James Ryan ‘... decided that, in order to make the Abbey Board less hermetically sealed and self-perpetuating, the number of shareholders be increased ...’ (Welch, 1999, 175) and that the government ‘should have the power to nominate two directors to the Board instead of one’ (176).

A draft alternative to the Dr. Andrews proposal, previously discussed by the Abbey Board, was considered at the 20 July 1964 Abbey Board meeting. This suggested that the Theatre should be put under the control of a State Board. It also suggested that the Minister appoint a second Director and made recommendations on shares allocations, the number of shareholders and how they should be selected.

Dr. Ryan acknowledged this letter in September and the Board minutes record agreement on the rotation of Directors and the re-nomination of Government appointees (29 September). Discussed at the 12 October meeting was the ‘Actors Nationalisation Proposal’ which suggested that the Theatre be subject to 17 public ‘trustees’ and that ‘An Artistic Director would be appointed with full powers in the artistic field’.

The Abbey Board met with the Minister, Dr. Ryan, on this restructuring and arising from that meeting

.... The Minister undertook before nominating the new 25 shareholders ... he would informally consult with the Board, with the object of ensuring that no one who might prove personally very difficult to work with would become a shareholder. (27 October 1964)

**Footnote 5.1:** In April 1964, The Abbey players gave notice of their intention to strike unless their demands for salary increases were met. This was just before the performance of *The Plough and the Stars* as part of a World Theatre Season in London. The players were backed by the Irish Transport and General Workers Union staff at the Abbey Theatre. Dr. C. S. Andrews was appointed mediator by the Irish Labour Court and pending the outcome of this mediation the strike was called off.

The early months of 1965 were concerned with advancing the restructuring proposals. The Minister issued letters of invitations to prospective shareholders. The Abbey Board minutes record some concern about voting imbalances between the Directors and the new Shareholders. The share allocation (30 shares each) to the new shareholders was proposed and seconded at the meeting on the 9 March 1965. Also in March a real concern was discussed about the number of new plays being submitted to the Abbey for consideration and the Board requested Ernest Blythe to write to established 'Authors to submit anything they had in hand as soon as possible.' Walter Macken was on this list and the letter was sent after the 6 April.

In parallel with this more formal activity by the Abbey Board, Vincent Dowling, then the secretary of the Abbey Players Council, in consultation with at least one other senior player made an approach to Walter Macken about the second government position. In his book, *Astride the Moon, A Theatrical Life* <sup>120</sup>, he mentions this approach to Macken by himself and Philip O'Flynn regarding the position of the second government Director.

Phil suddenly said, 'there is only one person for this job. He's Irish. He's a famous novelist and successful playwright; he's an Irish-speaker, but not a fanatical one. He knows Blythe, knows how to handle him. Blythe admires him. He'll be acceptable to the government and to the players. He's a friend of ours. I say let's ask him'.

.... We called him at home in Oughterard. After a moment's hesitation he said ironically, in his rumbling Galway voice, 'You're nice friends, I must say! I suppose I'll have to say yes'. (Dowling, 2000, 254)

The candidate for the second Government position was also receiving attention from the Abbey Board. Under the heading 'New Director', the Board agree that Blythe should make the following point about the background of the candidate to the Minister.

(a) That he should be a person likely to be able to work harmoniously with the existing Directors.

(b) That he should not be closely associated with a competing or strongly divergent interest so that no lack of confidence might arise and that there might be working at cross-purposes.

(c) That he should preferably be an Irish speaker so as to participate fully in that part of the work. (29 April 1965)

The Abbey Board were consulted on the appointment and the candidate to be nominated to the position by the Minister was Walter Macken.

The agreement between the Board and the Minister is recorded in the Abbey Board minutes who 'noted' that:

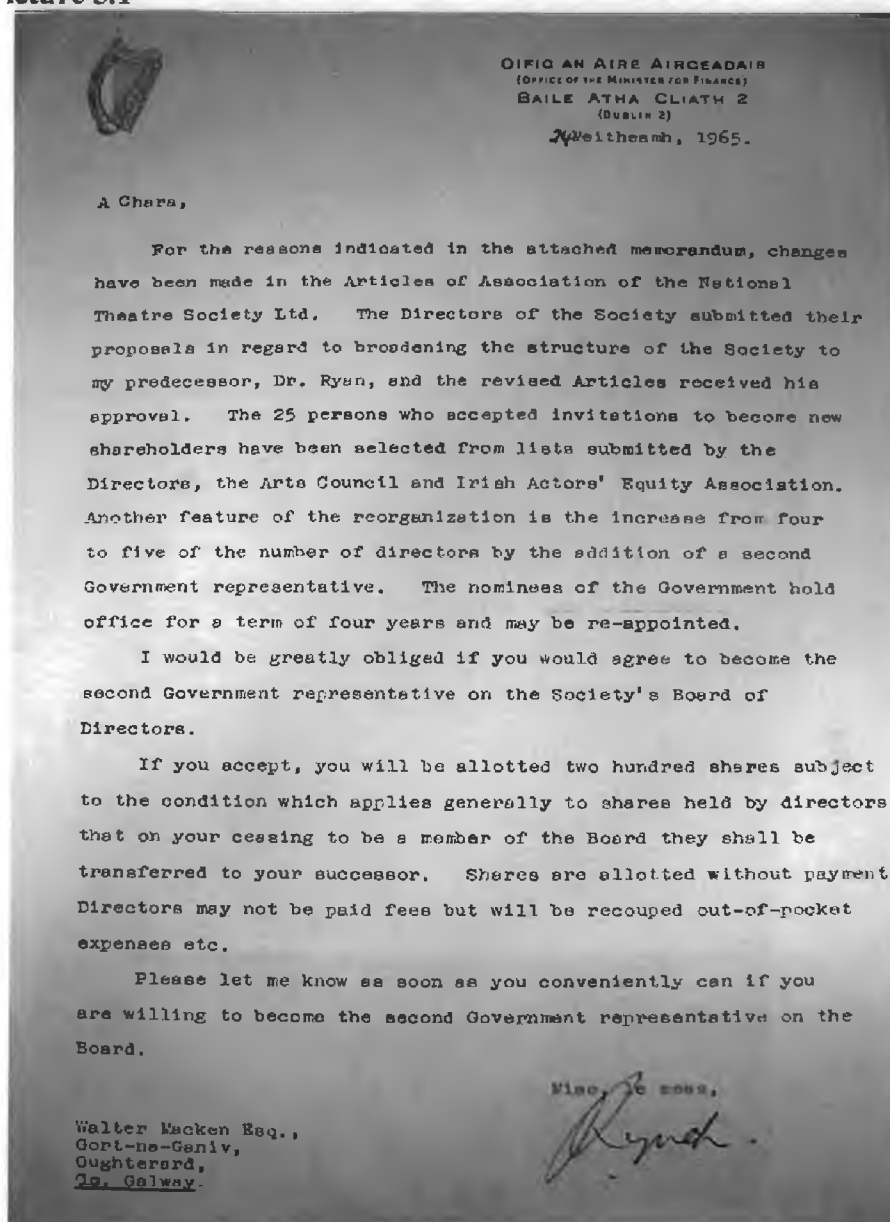
As agreed by the members of the Board I wrote to the Minister stating that we should welcome the appointment of Walter Macken but suggesting that it should not be made before Saturday next, so we might have the opportunity of putting him wise to the whole position of the theatre before he faces a meeting of Shareholders. I have had no reply to this letter which was sent on [no date mentioned] (22 June 1965)

At the same meeting the Board members considered the play list and made a selection of plays for future performances. They also agreed 'that a suitable outside producer might be engaged if a suitable play were available.' Macken was mentioned with Sheila Richards and MacLiammoir as possible producers.

The new Minister for Finance, Jack Lynch, (Footnote 5.2) wrote to Macken on the 24 June 1965 outlining the circumstances at the Abbey Theatre and requesting that he accept the position of second government representative on the Abbey Board. The appointment was for 4 years and it is clear from the letter that reappointment was very likely. <sup>121</sup>

**Footnote 5.2:** Dr. James Ryan served as Minister for Finance until his retirement in April 1965. He was replaced as Minister by Mr. Jack Lynch.

Picture 5.1



A national papers strike started on the 3 July 1965 and the three main papers, *The Irish Independent*, *The Irish Press* and *The Irish Times* were not in circulation again until the 13 September. This resulted in the Macken appointment to the Abbey Board not being reported by the national press. The exception was the 'Tatler's column' in the *Irish Independent* and on the 1 July 1965 it announced under the head-line:



**“Walter Macken to return to the Abbey Theatre as a director  
Second Government nominee on Board”**

**Picture 5.2**



‘Tatler’ considered ‘The news should be received with unqualified approval ....’

The report also mentioned another Macken play *The Last Gentleman* written with’ Cyril Cusack specially in mind’ and goes on to say that:

It will be presented in the Dublin Theatre Festival as soon as Mr. Cusack’s other commitments leave him free, and the author will direct and may also take a part.

A full copy of the Tatler report is attached as **Appendix 5.1.**

On the 20 July Blythe reported to the Board that he had

... received the warrant of the Minister of Finance appointing Walter Macken as the second Government Representative on the Board. We can pass a resolution of welcome today and invite him to the next meeting at which shares will be allocated.

On the 21 July 1965, Ernest Blythe wrote to Macken welcoming his appointment and outlining practical matters to do with Board meeting times and dates. He also referred to the Board policy of approving all plays and outlined the Abbey's play reading policy and procedure.

The Macken reply, dated 23 July, can be seen to be very positive about the appointment and his genuine 'desire to be of some help to you [Blythe]'.<sup>122</sup>

### Picture 5.3

GORT NA GANIV,  
Oughterard,  
Co. Galway.  
July 23, 1965.

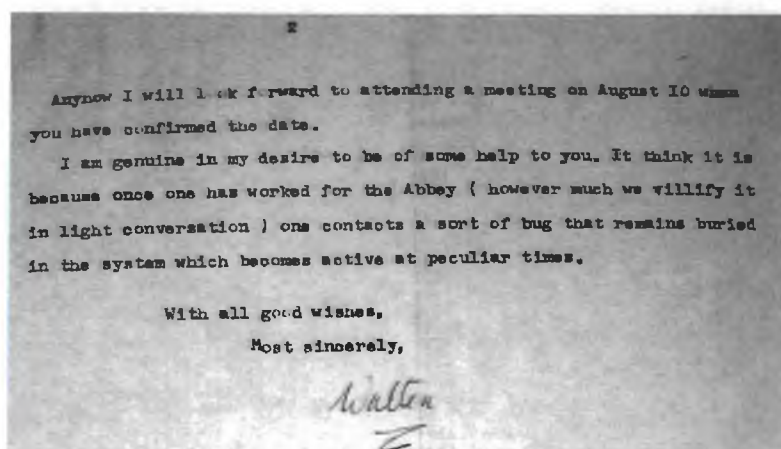
Dear Earnain,

Many thanks for your friendly and informative letter of the 21st. I don't know how, at the moment, but I hope honestly that I will be of some help on the Board as a Director, if only on the assumption that five heads might be better than four.

I had intended to go and reside in Dublin for a few years to gather atmosphere for a future book, but I won't be able to carry out that plan immediately, as we are in the process of selling our home here, and building a small cottage convenient to Galway more suited to our advancing years and declining energy, and at least until that is settled I will have to commute to meetings of the Board.

I'm afraid this will involve you in expense. When I was asked if I would act as a Director, I was naive enough to think that the Dept. of Finance would meet my expenses, but they inform me they must come from Abbey funds and as I know your funds are tight, it made me reluctant. I would bear the expense myself, but my reputation for the possession of it exceeds my income by a good margin.

To attend a meeting on Tuesday evening I would have to go up on Monday because I want to go and see the performance of whatever particular play is on Monday evening to get acquainted with the production and the new actors and actresses whose work I do not know. This would involve two nights in Dublin, travelling expenses and so on. I am quite willing to do this, but how do you feel about it?



In his reply on the 26 July 1965 to this letter Ernest Blythe encouraged Macken to travel early to Dublin and see whatever Abbey play was showing and said that he should not worry about the expenses, though he expressed concern about the amount of time Macken would spend travelling to attend Board meetings every two weeks.

Blythe mentioned also two matters that he felt all the directors should be present for and those were the casting of a new play and the acceptance or rejection of a play where not all the directors are in agreement.

At the next meeting, 10 August, Walter Macken received his 200 Abbey shares, **Appendix 5.2**,<sup>123</sup> and 'Dr. Wilmot proposed and Mr. Gabriel Fallon seconded a vote of welcome' to the new member.

The Abbey Board members during this period were Ernest Blythe, Gabriel Fallon, Riobard Ó Farachan and Dr. Seamus Wilmot. Dr. Wilmot was the Government nominee.

Walter Macken appeared to settle in very well with the other Board members and was playing a full part in the proceedings. During the discussion on *The Pilgrim's Mother* on the 31 August, Blythe described it '... perhaps dangerously light and shallow' and Macken '...thought the American accents put on by Miss O'Hara and Miss Barrington were bad and he thought the play was a very bad one.' In marked contrast to these

comments Blythe provided, presumably to the Board members, a review from *Variety* on this play. The review dated the 4 August was copied and sent to Blythe and he had it retyped. The retyped review, **Appendix 5.3**<sup>124</sup>, mentioned ‘Joan O’Hara is a standout as the American columnist. She has caught the character and holds it under control throughout the piece.’ The final words described the show ‘It’s not a world-shaker, but is good light entertainment.’

The Board, at the same meeting, ‘agreed that the Shareholders meeting should be on the second Saturday in October, October 9<sup>th</sup>.’ At Blythe’s suggestion the Board was to ‘Consider the selection of six plays which we shall aim to produce in our first year in the new building.’ (**Footnote 5.3**)

Macken was now also reading new works submitted to the Abbey.

The Board position on regular meetings with the Players Council received attention at the 5 October meeting. This was at the request of Vincent Dowling (Secretary of the Council). The Board split on this matter with Blythe and Fallon against, Wilmot and Macken in favour of meeting the players. The Chairman was O’Farachain and after further discussion it was agreed that Blythe

Should ask the Players Council what they wanted to discuss with the Directors and that he should report back to the Board their reply.

From the early part of this year the contentious matter of the Abbey Theatre having an Artistic Director had come to the surface yet again and with the increase in the number of shareholders it would appear to have been receiving such attention that the matter could no longer be ignored or suppressed.

**Footnote 5.3:** Here there is a gap in the minute book. The minutes of the 31 August meeting appears to ‘run into’ a subsequent meeting or meetings. After several pages of the minutes of the 31 August meeting there appears the requested list of plays mentioned above. The ‘combined minutes’ were signed by Riobard O Farachain and dated 5 October 1965.

Blythe's reign at the Abbey was always controversial and it was no different at this time. According to Welch:

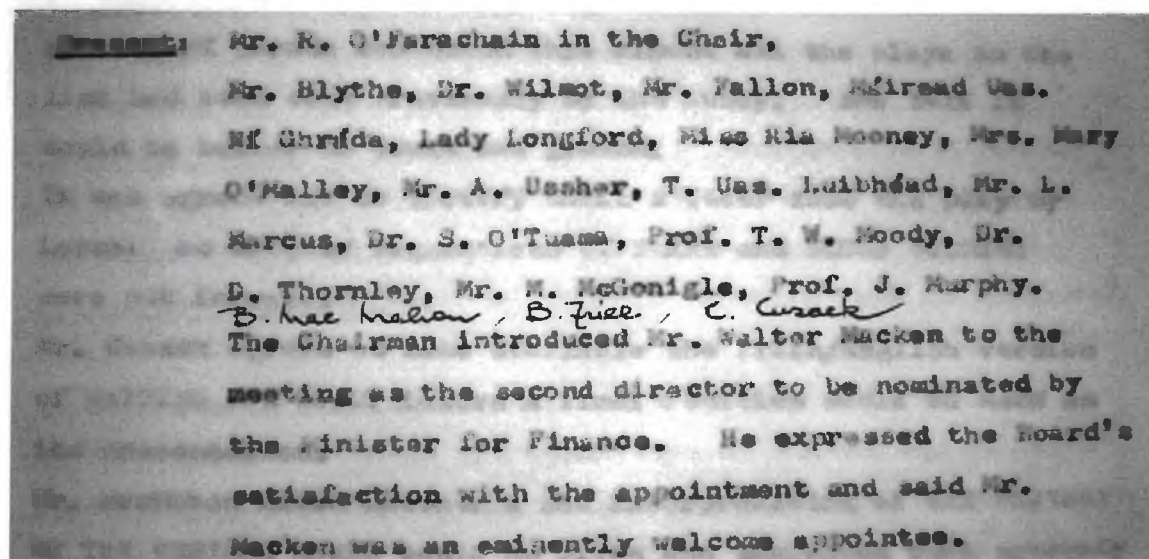
The enlarged Irish National Theatre Society\* now attempted to curtail the authority of the managing director by appointing an artistic director. This Blythe bitterly opposed' (1999, 176).

[\*Irish National Theatre/ Abbey Theatre, (1999, 22)]

The concept of an 'artistic adviser' was broached initially by the Board in May 1965. The issue was raised again at an Extraordinary General Meeting (EGM) of the National Theatre Society Ltd., on the 9 October that year.

The attendance at that meeting included many of the established names in Irish theatre and also those with a wider political interest. It was at this meeting that the Chairman, Mr. R. O'Farachain, introduced Walter Macken as 'the second director to be nominated by the Minister of Finance'. He also expressed 'the Board's satisfaction with the appointment'.

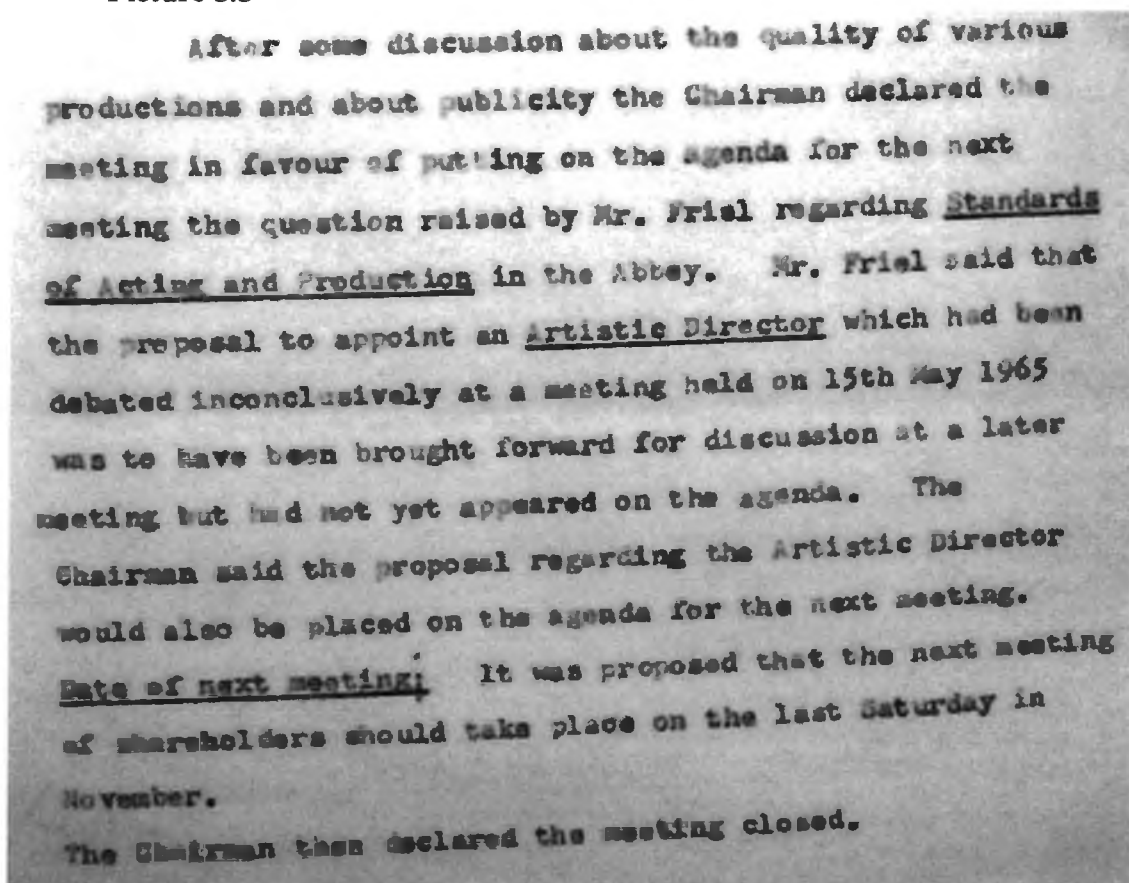
Picture 5.4 confirms the attendance at the EGM.



The minutes of this meeting record on page 3 the discussion on the question of the appointment of an 'Artistic Director'. The relevant part of the minutes dealing with this subject and concerns for the 'Standards of Acting and Production at the Abbey' are reproduced in Picture 5.5.

The meeting agreed that both items be on the agenda for the meeting to be held in November 1965.

#### Picture 5.5



After some discussion about the quality of various productions and about publicity the Chairman declared the meeting in favour of putting on the agenda for the next meeting the question raised by Mr. Friel regarding Standards of Acting and Production in the Abbey. Mr. Friel said that the proposal to appoint an Artistic Director which had been debated inconclusively at a meeting held on 15th May 1965 was to have been brought forward for discussion at a later meeting but had not yet appeared on the agenda. The Chairman said the proposal regarding the Artistic Director would also be placed on the agenda for the next meeting. Date of next meeting: It was proposed that the next meeting of shareholders should take place on the last Saturday in November. The Chairman then declared the meeting closed.

The complete Minutes of this EGM are in Appendix 5.4.<sup>125</sup>

Walter Macken was not present at the meeting of the Board on the 27 October when Blythe reported on his contacts with the Players Council.

I referred to the proposal to appoint an artistic director originally put forward by Equity and they seemed not to want to discuss the question. Perhaps mistakenly I thought they were taken aback when I said that we objected to the artistic director idea not only because it would take the choice of play and control of policy from the Directors but also because an artistic director would have power to appoint and dismiss players and change the entire company....

Blythe's report was 'Noted' by the meeting.

Macken was present at the Board meeting on the 16 November. After the formal opening agenda items, the Manager presented a four page account on the scope and control likely to be exercised by an Artistic Director. He argued that with the issue likely to be 'raised by Mr. Friel and perhaps others' at the Shareholders meeting that such an appointment would be in opposition to the purpose for which the Abbey existed.

There is a fundamental difference between the task of the Abbey and that of the National Theatre of a country in which the native culture has not been overlain or placed in jeopardy.... Maintenance of the national character of the Abbey cannot be achieved by hiring someone, possibly a foreigner or an Irishman without much national feeling and without real roots in the country and giving him a free hand....

I think it is essential that in future, as in the past the selection of plays should rest with the Directors....

Blythe's report was 'Approved by the Directors' and forms part of the meeting minutes.

The following extract is transcribed verbatim from the handwritten record of the follow-up discussion among Board members on the 'artistic director idea.'

Dr. Wilmot said he wished to propose that a man be appointed who would act as an assistant to Mr. Blythe and watch the artistic side of productions in the theatre. He said he was very displeased with the staging of the poems and ballads in the Yeats Memorial performance and he felt that the appointment he suggested was necessary. He proposed Mr. Walter Macken as a suitable man for the position. He was an actor, dramatist and producer. He would work with Mr. Blythe, not independently of him. He would also be in a position to carry on the work of the theatre if Mr. Blythe was not available.

Mr. Blythe said he did not know Mr. Macken well as other members of the Board but he agreed with Dr. Wilmot's proposal.

Mr. Macken said the proposal would mean he would have to abandon the work he was at and that it would mean his having to live in Dublin. His only desire was to help the theatre in any way he could.

After some further discussion it was decided that the Board agree in principle with Dr. Wilmot's proposal but that there would be no finality until the matter was discussed at the next meeting on Wednesday 17 November when Mr. O Farachain would be present.

The meeting adjourned until the 17 November 1965 'when all Directors were present, Mr. O Farachain in the chair'.

At the reconvened meeting Mr. O Farachain objected to the suddenness of Wilmot's proposal and felt 'embarrassed by the linking of a name with the proposal'. After he had made his point O Farachain had '...no objection to the appointment of an Artistic Director as proposed by Dr. Wilmot.'

The other Directors assented.



As there was unanimous agreement to the proposal the Board discussed the title to be given to the position and it was agreed that the title should be Assistant Manager and Artistic Adviser.

Mr. Macken said he would think over the proposal that he should take the position and he would let the Directors know on what terms he would take it.

A meeting of the Directors excluding Mr. Macken could then be held to discuss the matter.

This meeting on the 24 November 1965 was described as a 'special' meeting. Walter Macken did not attend. The other four Directors were present. The Board 'discussed and agreed on the terms on which they would offer Mr. Walter Macken the post of Assistant Manager and Artistic Adviser.'

The opening paragraph of the proposal read:

The appointment is made in the hope and expectation that he will succeed the present Manager, a decision on the point will however, be made within a year of his taking office, which is assumed, will be in or about March 1966 but not later than 31 December 1966.

Blythe was authorised to prepare a letter of offer for Macken. This letter was to be approved by the Board and only when it had received Board approval was it to be sent to Macken.

Blythe told the Board at this meeting 'that after the opening of the new theatre he would think of gradually getting out.'

On this latter point 'the Board unanimously agreed that Mr. Blythe should be allowed to retire whenever he himself wished it.'

Furthermore, ‘the Board agreed that if the position was accepted by Mr. Macken the Press should be notified before the Shareholders meeting which would take place on Saturday 4<sup>th</sup> December.’

On the 25 November 1965 Ernest Blythe wrote to Macken regarding the ‘Terms and Conditions’ for his appointment as ‘Assistant Manager and Artistic Adviser’. The style and content makes this an interesting letter, see **Appendix 5.5**. This was almost immediately followed by a further letter dated the 27 November offering the two positions to Macken.

The second letter, <sup>126</sup> with page one heavily edited, is reproduced here in full (**Picture 5.6**). We could speculate on the owners of the handwriting on page one but the line “Within the year but not later than” looks like Macken’s writing. What we know is that this letter in its present condition was in the possession of Walter Macken which points to his involvement in its preparation. The drafting does clear up the somewhat ambiguous statement with the same form of words and recorded in the Abbey minute book for the 24 November.

All indications are that Walter Macken was interested in the positions at the Abbey and saw no conflict of interest with his Government appointment as an Abbey Board member or with his writing commitments, **Picture 5.6**, next page.

Picture 5.6



Guthán  
Oifig na dTicéad 44505  
Oifig an Rúnai 43412

## AMHARCLANN NA MAINISTREACH

BLEÁ CLIATH, 2, ABBEY THEATRE, DUBLIN 2.

Dáta 27th November 1965.

Stiurthóir: EARNAN DE BLAGHD, ROIBEARD Ó FARACHAIN,  
SÉAMUS DE BHILMOT, GAIBRIAL O FALLÚIN  
Bainisteoir Stiurtha: EARNAN DE BLAGHD  
Rúnai: ERIC GORMAN

Mr. Walter Macken,  
Gort Na Ganiv,  
Oughterard,  
CO. GALWAY.

Dear Walter,

The Board has considered your proposed appointment as Assistant Manager and Artistic Adviser and now offers you the appointment on the following terms:-

*on the basis that*  
The appointment is made ~~in the hope and expectation that~~  
you will succeed the present Manager, ~~but an assurance has to~~  
~~this effect is given at present.~~ *Stiff* ~~A decision on the point will~~  
~~however, be made within a year of your taking office, and it~~  
~~is assumed, will be in or about March 1966.~~ *within the year but not later than*  
*before the 31st December 1966.*

The salary for the post of Assistant Manager and Artistic Adviser will be £1,350..... which together with the £100 payable to Directors for reading scripts, will make a total of £1,450.....

The salary for the post of Manager, which will be higher, will be fixed when the vacancy arises.

During your occupancy of the post of Assistant Manager and Artistic Adviser, which will be a wholetime one, you will not, without the consent of the Board produce or act in any other

theatre or accept employment in connection with any dramatic performance outside the Abbey Theatre.

Your annual holiday period will be four weeks.

Your appointment may be terminated by the Board on six months notice or on payment of six months salary in lieu of notice. In view, however, of the cost and disturbance to you arising from your transfer to Dublin to take up the post, it is agreed that in case the Directors should terminate your appointment within eighteen months, the sum which will thereupon become payable to you will include, in addition to six months salary, an amount which <sup>will</sup> bring the total paid to you since appointment up to the equivalent of two years salary.

The intention of the Board is that you should work to the present Manager, and in close co-operation with him in the period during which he will remain in office. It is contemplated that you should familiarise yourself as soon as possible with every aspect of the working of the Abbey Theatre, and take responsibility as <sup>will</sup> be arranged, both on the business and artistic sides, and that you should assist particularly with production, <sup>preparing & promotion.</sup> advising and consulting with producers, advising on the assignment of work to different producers, dealing with the discipline of actors and stage staff, advising on the appointment and dismissal of actors and on the engagement for particular plays of scenic designers and producers from outside.

The Board may, from time to time, authorise you to undertake productions in the Abbey yourself, when you think that advisable or necessary and will, in exceptional cases, agree to your acting in a play in the Abbey, should you so desire. After you have been a few months here and familiarised yourself with all aspects of the work of the Abbey, if you should be willing, at the request of the Board, to go for a period to a suitable theatre in London or elsewhere for the purpose of gleaning information about new trends and methods which might be useful in the Abbey, the Board will be prepared to meet the expenses involved.

It is the intention of the Board, subject to the agreement and assistance of the Minister for Finance, to establish a pensions scheme for actors and other employees of the theatre. If and when such a pension scheme is established, there will be a retiring age of sixty-five but with power for the Board to extend the age limit in suitable cases.

Yours sincerely,

*Ernest Blythe*

This is a comprehensive letter of offer and makes clear the intention that Walter Macken was to be Ernest Blythe's successor. Paragraph 2 of the offer letter seems to point to the appointment being made not later than the 31 December 1966.

The letter mentions the position of "Manager", also on page 1. 'The salary for the post of Manager, which will be higher, will be fixed when the vacancy arises.'

The letter also anticipates the retirement of the present Manager and on page 2 we read:

**Picture 5.7**

The intention of the Board is that you should work to the present Manager, and in close co-operation with him in the period during which he will remain in office. It is contemplated that

It is clear that the position of assistant manager and artistic adviser would report to the present manager and the letter also expects total involvement in the running of all aspects of the theatre. Interestingly, the letter acknowledged Macken's wider theatre skills and experience stating on page 3:

The Board may, from time to time, authorise you to take productions in the Abbey yourself, when you think that advisable or necessary and will, in exceptional cases, agree to your acting in plays in the Abbey, should you so desire.

The Board approved the amended terms of employment at their meeting on the 2 December. Walter Macken attended that meeting. The minutes of this meeting and the one of the 24 November were approved by the Board and signed by Dr. Wilmot on the 4 January 1966.

According to Hunt, Walter Macken took up office in November 1965. (Hunt, 1979, 191)

Welch reports that at the Shareholders meeting, in December 1965,

... the Board adopted a resolution welcoming the appointment of Walter Macken as assistant manager and artistic adviser. The artistic adviser would function on a consultative basis and report to the Board. (1999, 176)

The Shareholders did 'Welcome the appointment ...' (**Picture 5.8**, page 207)

The proposal to appoint Walter Macken as assistant manager and artistic adviser was confirmed at an EGM of the National Theatre Society Ltd., held on the 4 December 1965.

Picture 5.8: Page 1 from the minutes of the EGM meeting<sup>127</sup>

Minutes of an Extraordinary General Meeting of the National Theatre Society Ltd., held at Wynn's Hotel, Lr. Abbey Street, Dublin, on Saturday 4th December 1965 at 2.30 p.m.

Present: Mr. R. O'Farachain in the Chair,  
Mr. Blythe, Dr. Wilmot, Mr. Fallon, Mr. Macken,  
Miss S. Richards, Lady Longford, Mrs. O'Malley,  
An Dr. O Ráifeartaigh, Prof. O Briain,  
Mr. MacMahon, An tUas. O Dálaigh, An tUas.  
O hAodha, Mr. Ussher, an tUas. Luibhéad,  
Mr. McCarthy, Mr. Marcus.

Apologies were received from Miss Rita Mooney,  
Dr. Donoghue, Prof. O Murchú and Mr. B. Friel  
who were unable to attend the meeting.

Minutes: of the meeting held on 9th October 1965 -  
a copy had been circulated to each shareholder.  
Having been taken as read they were confirmed  
and signed.

Item 4 on the Agenda - the proposal to appoint an  
Assistant Manager and Artistic Advisor was taken first.  
The letter of appointment sent to Mr. Macken was read  
to the meeting and it was proposed by An tUas. C. O.  
Dálaigh, seconded by an tUas. M. O'hAodha and carried  
unanimously,

Resolution No. 10 "that the shareholders welcome the  
appointment of Mr. Walter Macken."

Mr. Macken thanked the meeting and said his task would  
not be a "one-man-job". Co-operative effort was  
essential to creating the right atmosphere.



Additional to what we may learn from Blythe's letter dated the 27 November (**Picture 5.6**) there is also within the Wuppertal archive a two-page document that outlines the 'Suggested duties...' of the assistant manager and artistic director. Unfortunately, the document is undated.<sup>128</sup>

See **Appendix 5.6** for the full document.

These 'Suggested duties...' may have been brought to the Abbey Board in November as a discussion document or perhaps it was agreed with Macken prior to the letter of offer dated 27 November 1965. However, its contents point to it being a later document in that its mention of a 'not later than' hand-over date of the 30 September 1967.

The document title refers to the position of Artistic Adviser (subsequently Director) while in paragraph one the Assistant Manager has the clear expectation to succeed the Manager

...within a stated period of time (say three months after the opening of the new theatre but not later than 30 September 1967).

The duties of the Artistic Adviser, paragraph 2.1, include responsibility

...within the ideals and first principles of the founders of the Abbey Theatre (and the Theatre's Patent) for the direction of policy in the selection of plays.

The 'catch-all' paragraph 7 encompasses all other duties and responsibilities of an Artistic Director in the sweeping sentence

Generally any duty which falls within the province of an Artistic Director.

The fact that this document is in the Macken archive in Germany would establish that Macken knew of its contents and that he had a clear expectation to succeed Ernest Blythe



as Manager of the Abbey Theatre. We could also assume that he had a longer term interest in the position(s) than proved to be the case.

Macken's appointment as artistic adviser and assistant manager was reported in all the national papers as well as many of the local papers. A flavour of this interest can be found in The Irish Times interview with Gabriel Fallon at the time of the appointment. This appeared in *The Irish Times* on the 14 December 1965, **Picture 5.9**. The full interview can be read in **Appendix 5.7**.

**Picture 5.9**



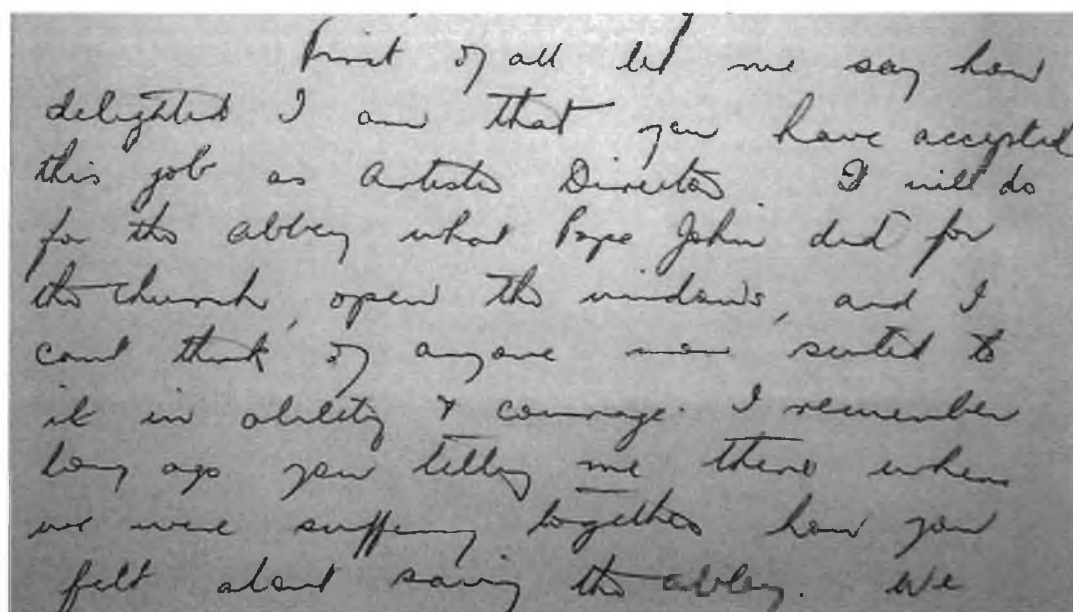
*The Irish Press*, reported on the 'New Post at Abbey' on the 3 December 1965.

The title Artistic Adviser vs. Artistic Director debate, mentioned in the Fallon interview was also something that was thought about by Macken. In the Wuppertal papers <sup>129</sup> there is a transcript with prepared answers to possible question on this subject and Macken's interest in and commitment to the position, **Picture 5.10**.

Picture 5.10

- Q.1. My feelings about this appointment are mixed. As a writer who has lived for 15 years in the West it is quite a wrench to go and live again in a city. On the other hand, anyone who has ever worked for the Abbey will tell you of the sort of disease it engenders, a sort of love-hate relationship. It has an attraction for people who have ever worked there, which cannot be put into words. A good number of the Company are my friends; we know one another well, and I'm looking forward to working with them again.
- Q.2. "Adviser" "Director" are just words. I am already a Director on the Board of Directors. It was thought advisable to use the name "Adviser" on that account.
- Q.3. Only time will tell. Everyone will have to become involved in the new Theatre, you who ask the questions, and your readers, as well as the Directors, the Shareholders, the

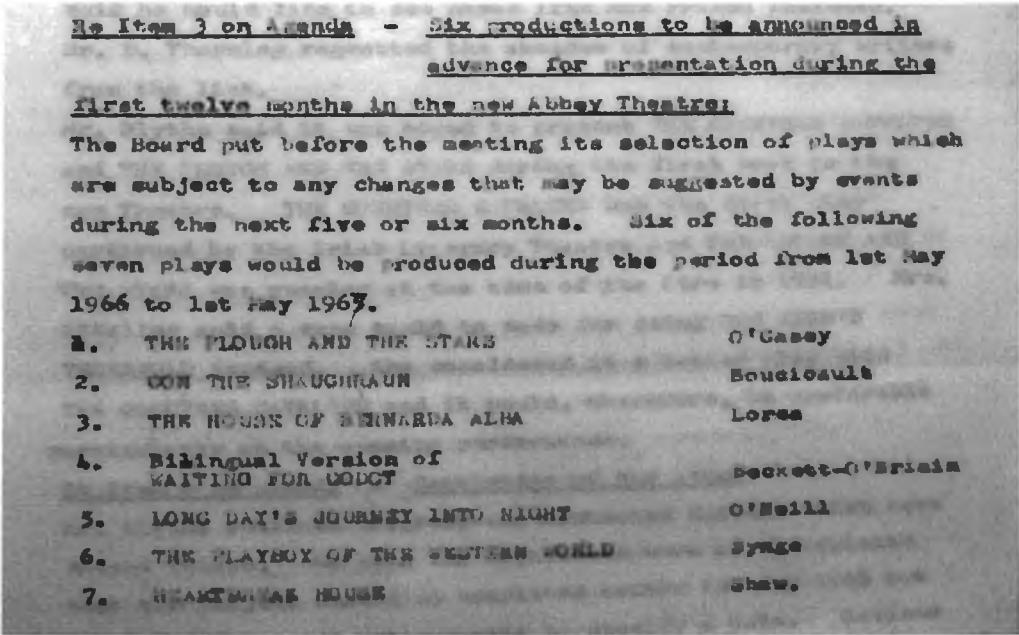
Walter Macken's appointment as 'Artistic Director' also received support from many prominent actors. An example is an undated letter from Marie Kean likely written towards the end of 1965.<sup>130</sup> The relevant paragraph from her letter is reproduced in Picture 5.11.



First of all let me say how delighted I am that you have accepted this job as Artistic Director. I will do for the Abbey what Pope John did for the Church, open the windows, and I could think of anyone more suited to it in ability & courage. I remember long ago you telling me there when we were suffering together how you felt about saving the Abbey. We

Walter Macken from the time he became a Director became immediately involved the workings of the Board and this included play selection. At the EGM held on the 9 October 1965 (see Appendix 5.4) the proposed programme for performances was presented to the Shareholders and this covered the period from the 1 May 1966 until 1 May 1967.

Picture 5.12



The plays planned for production during the remainder of 1965 and up until May 1966 had already been approved. As was the practice at the Abbey at the time the exact opening date was subject to the attendance figures at the preceding play. Plays that attracted good audiences were allowed longer runs while those that had poor audience support could be taken off after just two weeks.

- *Emer agus an Laoch*, 28 December 1965
- *The Conspiracy* by Kenneth Deale, 2 February 1966
- *The Call* by Thomas Coffey, 14 March
- *The Hall of Healing* by Sean O'Casey in a double bill with *Yerma* by Federico Garcia Lorca, 28 February 1966 <sup>131</sup>
- *The Irish Woman of the Year* by John Power, 16 May with *The Gaol Gate* by Lady Gregory.

Routine correspondence from Blythe to the Directors for the remainder of 1965 and into 1966 mentioned play announcements, *The Conspiracy* and *Yerma* (29 December), scheduling arrangements, *The Conspiracy* cast (31 December 1965) and a discovered mortgage on the Abbey Theatre (13 January 1966).

At the 19 January 1966 Board meeting:

Mr. Macken outlined a proposal for a production on the first night of the new Abbey Theatre which he suggested should be entitled *The Abbey Story*.

The production would be a two hour show consisting of ten minute excerpts from famous Abbey plays, scenes in the old Green Room and in the theatre on the night of the fire. The various scenes to be linked by a narrator.

The Board agreed that the 'proposal should have further consideration and suggested that Mr. Macken submit a script of the proposed performance. Mr. Macken agreed to do so.'

Changes to the Abbey's work practices were also being considered. There is no evidence to suggest if Macken was instrumental in raising such matters but the fact is that they were occurring as he was accepting more responsibility for his new positions.

At the Board meeting on 8 February 1966:

The Board agreed that a meeting with the Players Council should be arranged for some evening at 5 or 5.30 p.m.

The headings for discussion would be:

- (1) Standards of acting and production
  - (a) Four weeks minimum for rehearsal
  - (b) Hours of rehearsal
  - (c) Outside work by Members of the Company.
- (2) Guest producers'

The outcome of any such meeting if indeed it did take place is not recorded in later minutes. All of the issues to be raised were contentious ones and the Players were never amenable to changes to established work practices. The Abbey minute book is strewn with examples of such resistance and in the context of this work we have only to refer to Dowling's book *Astride the Moon, A Theatrical Life* (2000, 262) already quoted.

Other matters raised as concerns in the Manager's Reports <sup>132</sup> over this period were attendances at the plays and the Players Council on the 2 December 1965 while the report of the 8 February 1966 reported on the small audiences for *Emer agus an Laoch* compared with similar productions in previous years.

During this time it seems likely that Macken would have some say in casting. Some of his early thoughts on a cast for *The Plough and the Stars* can be gleaned from ‘doodling’ found on the back of the Managers Report dated the 2 December 1965. This also lists the Abbey Players and notes the ages of some of the younger players.

### Picture 5.13



From the beginning of 1966 Macken became involved as a play reader for new works submitted to the Abbey. The practice appeared to be that selected Directors read new works and that these works were provided to them by the Manager. Their views were circulated among the Board members as 'Readers Opinions'. Examples of Macken's views on some of the new plays submitted and circulated in the 'Readers Opinions' provide a useful insight to this procedure and to Macken's perceptions of some of these new works.

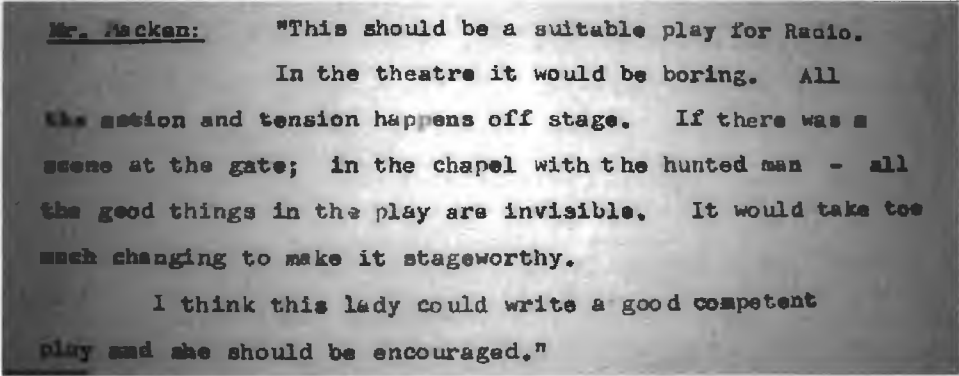
The 'Readers Opinions', dated 8 February 1966 <sup>133</sup> commented on the play *The Return Room* by A. N. Coughlan. The play received mixed but unfavourable comments from the readers:

Mr. O'Connor – "not recommended"

Mr. Fallon – "I would not be in favour of acceptance."

Mr. Blythe – "It is not clear that the Author means to give us a school play but that is what she has done."

Mr. Macken – Comments reproduced in full in **Picture 5.14**



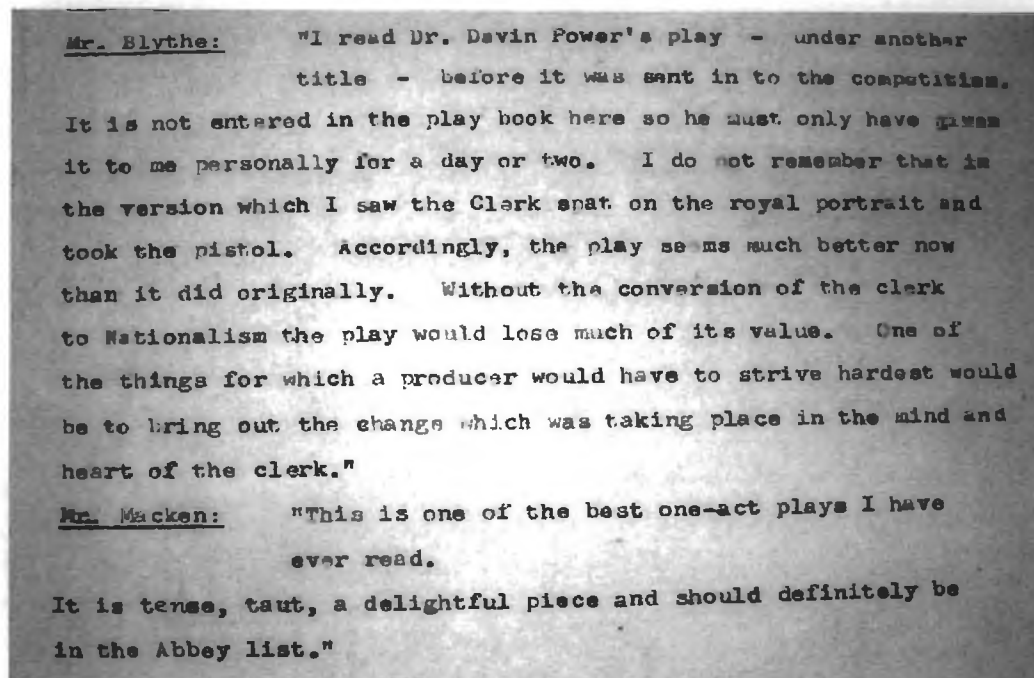
Mr. Macken: "This should be a suitable play for Radio.  
In the theatre it would be boring. All  
the action and tension happens off stage. If there was a  
scene at the gate; in the chapel with the hunted man - all  
the good things in the play are invisible. It would take too  
much changing to make it stageworthy.  
I think this lady could write a good competent  
play and she should be encouraged."

An undated opinion on the one Act play, *The General's Watch*, by Davin Power received more favourable comments:

Mr. Fallon – "Recommended for acceptance."

Mr. Blythe and Mr Macken comments reproduced in **Picture 5.15**

### Picture 5.15



On the 19 March 1966 Walter Macken recommitted himself to the Abbey Theatre Board by allowing his name to go forward for re-election as a Director. The *Report of the Directors* (see Appendix 5.8) to the Shareholders of The National Theatre Society Ltd., for the Annual General Meeting stated that 'Mr. Walter Macken retires under Article 6 and being eligible offered himself for re-election'.

The minutes of the 19 March 1966 AGM confirm that Walter Macken attended. There was also some controversy over 'a statement of income and expenditure.' The adoption of the Accounts and the Directors Report was deferred and the meeting adjourned to 30 April 1966.

The opening for the new Abbey was giving a tentative date of the 1 September 1966.

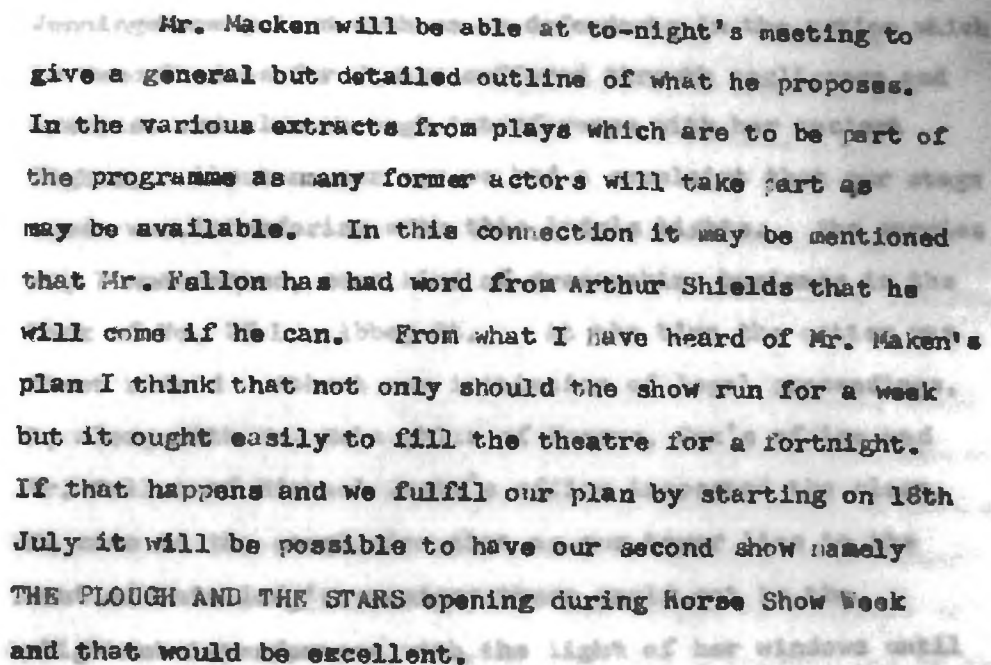
Macken was not listed as present or unable to attend the adjourned meeting. The Accounts were adopted. A limited run was suggested for *Recall the Years*. (P24/ 707)

The minutes of the Board meeting on the 5 April 1966 record Macken's involvement in the appointment of a PRO for the Theatre. This matter was discussed at the earlier Shareholders meeting and Macken was to 'make enquiries' about two of the applicants and to report his findings to the full Board. 'It was agreed that both men should be brought before the Board.'

The spring of 1966 was dominated by the preparations for the relocation of the Abbey Theatre Company to the custom built new Abbey Theatre in Abbey Street. The Manager's Report dated the 21 April 1966 deals, in the main, with preparations for the opening and gives a view of how this event was being planned and some of the attending problems. It also mentions Macken's role in this event, **Picture 5.16**.

The relevant extracts from the Manager's report, part of the minutes of that Board meeting are in **Appendix 5.9**.<sup>134</sup>

#### **Picture 5.16**



Mr. Macken will be able at to-night's meeting to give a general but detailed outline of what he proposes. In the various extracts from plays which are to be part of the programme as many former actors will take part as may be available. In this connection it may be mentioned that Mr. Fallon has had word from Arthur Shields that he will come if he can. From what I have heard of Mr. Macken's plan I think that not only should the show run for a week but it ought easily to fill the theatre for a fortnight. If that happens and we fulfil our plan by starting on 18th July it will be possible to have our second show namely THE PLOUGH AND THE STARS opening during Horse Show Week and that would be excellent.

Apparently there was some concern about the actual opening date with Blythe offering a 'Press Conference or something of the kind in the new building on the 18 July ...' as a



back-up position. Even with these reservations the Abbey Board agreed that Mr. Blythe should hold a Press conference announcing the opening of the new theatre as the 18 July.

The minutes also confirm that 'Mr. Macken gave a detailed account of the proposed opening production at the new theatre' and that he suggested that the production 'should be entitled *Recall the Years* devised by Walter Macken.'

The report goes on to mention in some detail the preparation for the production of *The Plough and the Stars* in August. This was to be the first play on the new stage. Clearly the intention was that this production should be something special and this is mentioned in the following extracts.

**Picture 5.17**

**THE PLOUGH AND THE STARS**

A suggested cast for THE PLOUGH AND THE STARS will be submitted at next meeting after some further auditions have been held. It is certain that by making full use of the resources of the new stage and refurbishing the cast we can put on a production of THE PLOUGH AND THE STARS very different from anything that has yet been seen. It can be novel and striking while avoiding all the absurdities which made the Mermaid production of the play such a disappointment.

Mr. Dermody's ideas of what can be done are still tentative. But I think it is possible by some bold casting

-3-

changes to achieve great freshness and to achieve new harmonies in a performance of THE PLOUGH AND THE STARS which together with the novelty which will come from use of the new stage resources will enable us to carry on triumphantly throughout August except in so far as we turn to alternation to enable visitors to see two Abbey plays during a brief stay.

The 'bold casting changes to achieve greater freshness' may have caused some tension and misunderstandings between Macken and Dermody and within the Abbey players and, in some way, could have contributed to Macken's resignation some months later.

The invitations for the opening night were also a source for some concern. Blythe in the same Report suggested 'I suppose we should now give the President the 18 July as the probable opening date and ask him to reserve it.'

The possible invitation dilemma and who is invited to speak at the opening of the Theatre is interestingly addressed by the following suggestion from Walter Macken that

...we should try as far possible to talk about an opening week rather than an opening night and get as many people as possible to feel that they are being treated with due consideration if they get invited any night in the first week.

Arising from this it was to be the President on the first night. Wednesday was suggested as the night for An Taoiseach who was also to unveil a plaque to commemorate the seven members of the Abbey staff who participated in the Easter Rising. For Mr. MacEntee, the former Tanaiste, the first advocate of the re-building of the Abbey, Blythe considered

...we might perhaps, think up some ceremony which he could be asked to perform on the Friday night ....We must give him, above all, some part in the opening.

Following the Macken suggestion of an 'opening week' the manager seemed satisfied that

...we may be able to invite all the people who we think have a claim on the theatre and avoid giving offence by dropping any of them as might be necessary if we had only one opening night.

The question of the appointment of a Public Relations Officer for the Abbey continued to occupy the Board's attention. Because of additional applicants the Board approved that Blythe and Macken should '...interview the applicants in a preliminary way during the next few days and arrange for one or more who may seem possible to meet the Board.'

This all could indicate that Macken was settling comfortably into his position as assistant manager and artistic adviser. He appeared to be playing a full role in the running of the theatre and in addition to his administrative work, he was writing the script for the opening celebration in July. This had him working directly with the producers and the Abbey players.

Also, as the government nominee on the Abbey Board, he had a full involvement in all the business aspects of the Abbey Theatre and the impression could be given that he was content with his multiple roles.

It would seem that the casting of *The Plough and the Stars*, due to open in August 1966, caused controversy.

The last play on the old Abbey stage on the 17 July 1951, the night the theatre burned down, was *The Plough and the Stars* and it was seen to be appropriate that the first play to be produced on the new Abbey stage would be *The Plough*.

Dowling in his book, *Astride the Moon, A Theatrical Life* reports a conversation Macken had with him, after the October 1965 EGM, about his plans for the first play for the new Abbey. (2000, 262):

Shortly afterwards, he told me that, in the first play to be produced at the new Abbey, I would be cast as Fluther Good, the great male character role, in *The Plough and the Stars*. I told him I would prefer to stay in the Covey, that I had another five years in that part and would grow further in it. Equally important,

Phil O'Flynn and Angela [Newman] would be shattered. 'Phil is Fluther and can have twenty more years in it,' I told Wally.

Wally said, 'Vincent, if we are ever going to change the Abbey, we have to begin breaking the old ways of doing our famous plays. You'll play Fluther, Phil will play Uncle Peter, and Angela won't play Rosie, she'll play Mrs. Gogan'.

Phil and Angela were shattered. They thought we should refuse....

Blythe's enthusiasm 'to achieve greater freshness' was mentioned to the Board at their meeting on the 3 May 1966. 'The idea has been to renew the freshness of the play as far as that can be done by having new interpretations of a number of parts...'

*The Plough and the Stars* opened on the 22 August 1966 with Vincent Dowling as Fluther, Philip O'Flynn as Uncle Peter, Angela Newman as Mrs. Gogan and the Young Covey was played by Donal McCann.<sup>135</sup>

Walter Macken continued his involvement in the day to day running of the theatre through May. His last Board meeting was on the 18 May and the Abbey minute book confirms his contribution. He did not attend the 7 June Board meeting and the minutes record no apology for absence.

The Manager's Report, part of that meeting minutes, opens:

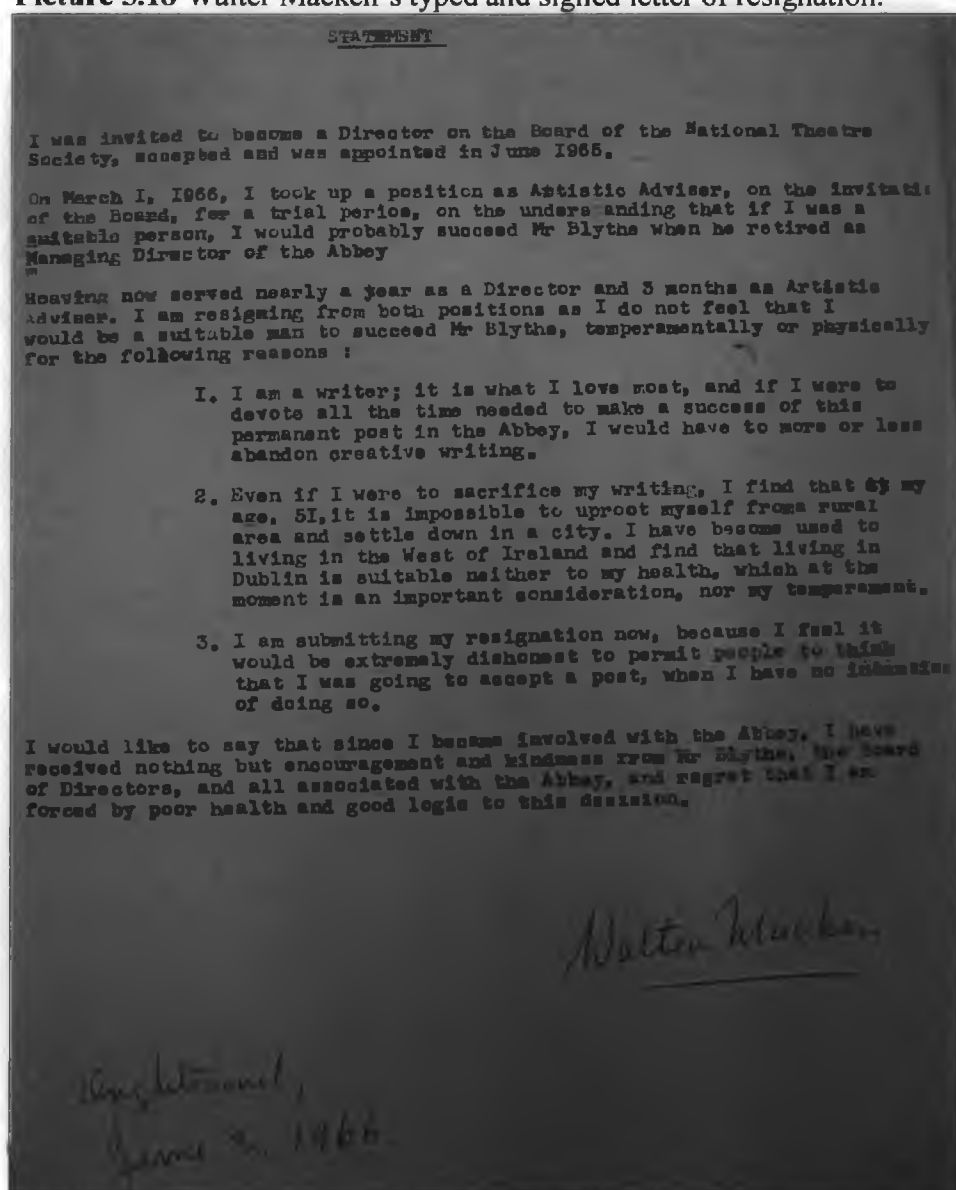
Walter Macken

I had no idea that Walter Macken contemplated resignation. Only a week or two ago he had been talking about the question of an office for himself in the new building. I have, however had a letter from him this morning saying that he will not re-consider his resignation but will assist with getting *Recall the Years* on the stage.

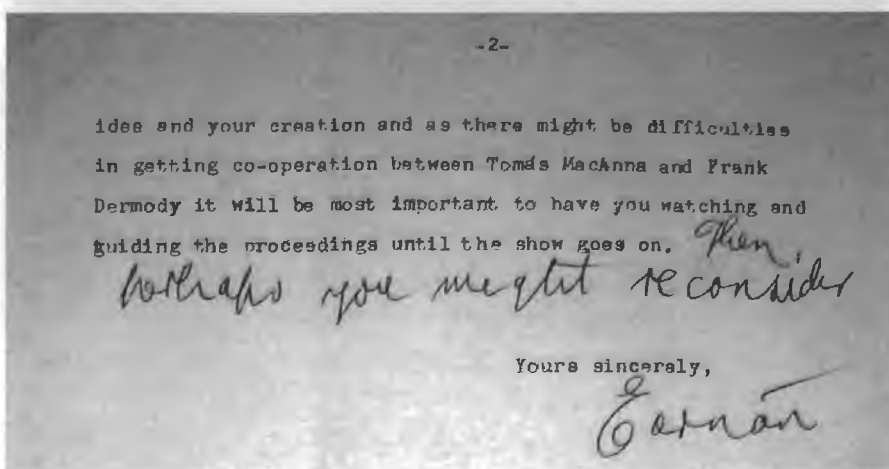
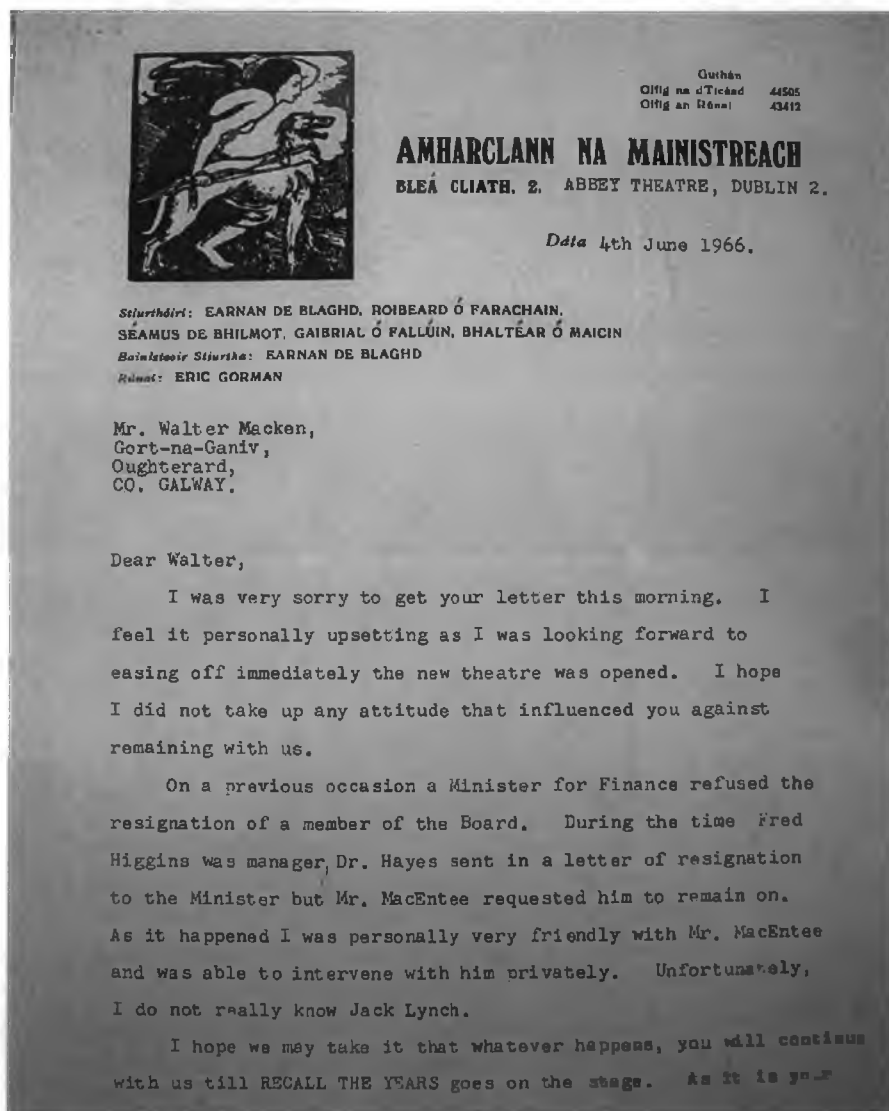
Blythe had received Walter Macken's letter of resignation,<sup>136</sup> dated 3 June 1966, see **Picture 5.18**. Blythe's reply to this is dated the following day, **Picture 5.19**.

There is an undated but initialled handwritten copy of Macken's resignation in the Wuppertal archive. This handwritten version of his resignation is reproduced in **Appendix 5.10**. In both documents Macken makes reference to his health and temperament, see also **Picture 5.20**.

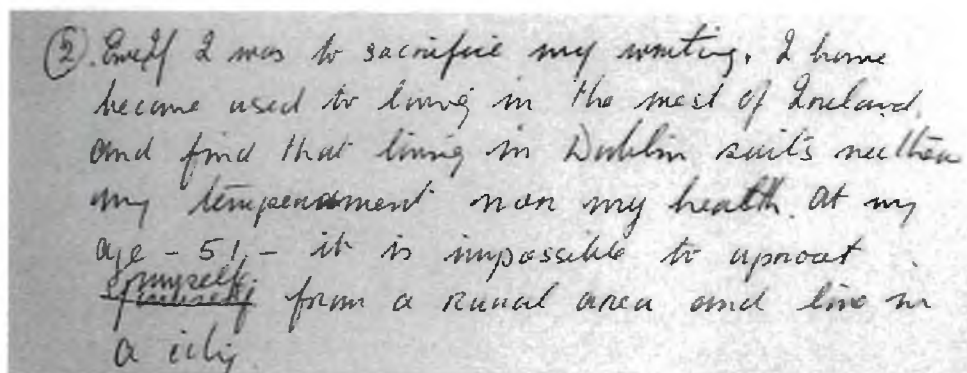
**Picture 5.18** Walter Macken's typed and signed letter of resignation.



Picture 5.19, Ernest Blythe's reply to Macken's resignation letter <sup>137</sup>



Picture 5.20 is the relevant paragraph from the handwritten draft.

A photograph of a handwritten draft paragraph in cursive script. The text is written on a light-colored, slightly textured paper. The handwriting is fluid and somewhat slanted. The paragraph is numbered '2' in a circle at the beginning. The text discusses the writer's decision to leave their home in the west of Ireland and move to Dublin, mentioning their age (51) and the difficulty of moving from a rural area to a city.

②. Well I was to sacrifice my writing, I have  
become used to living in the west of Ireland,  
and find that living in Dublin suits neither  
my temperament nor my health. At my  
age - 51 - it is impossible to uproot  
~~yourself~~ <sup>myself</sup> from a rural area and live in  
a city.

Ernest Blythe in his acknowledgement of the resignation letter expressed his personal disappointment with the decision and that he ‘was looking forward to easing off immediately the new theatre was opened.’

He did attempt to persuade Macken to reconsider but his immediate concern was the opening of the new Abbey Theatre with the Macken scripted opening programme, *Recall the Years*.

The Abbey minute book contains a copy of Macken’s reply to Blythe’s letter of the 4 June. It was sent from the Macken home in Co. Galway and is dated 6 June.

Dear Earnáin,

I had a suspicion that one of the people I was misleading was yourself. I knew and was convinced some time ago that I wasn’t the man for the job, but latterly found it hard to say so. I thought by going home and thinking I could solve it. The only way out as I saw was a complete break since I am unable by nature to dissemble.

I am sincere when I say that I found your whole attitude to me without fault; in fact you were willing to do things you found distasteful in order that you could give me every help, so please don’t think for a moment you had anything to do with my decision.

I am, of course, willing to continue as a Director until the Minister finds someone suitable to replace me.

I will stay with you until *Recall the Years* is launched, but I would be obliged if you would take me off the payroll. I will go to Dublin for a few days each week and you could pay my expenses. As long as people know I am not staying for good I don't mind, as I then know I am not deceiving anyone.

Please don't entertain the idea that I will reconsider. I was stupid in the first place to say "yes". It's my fault. I am too old to be tied down to an actual job. I ought to have thought more over it and then said no. I have been too long independent as a creative writer to be ambitious for anything else, and in the middle of agonising decision my health suffered badly. I will see you on the 14<sup>th</sup>.

Sincerely

After reading this letter into the meeting minutes the Board agreed

to hold a meeting on the 14 June 1966, at which Mr. Macken would be present. It was agreed that Mr. Macken should be paid a fee for what ever work he would do in connection with *Recall the Years* and *The Plough and the Stars*.

The Board then turned its attention to finding a replacement assistant manager and also artistic adviser.

Before this meeting took place Macken had written to the Minister of Finance, Jack Lynch. Lynch replied on the 10 June accepting Macken's resignation.

May I add a word of appreciation and thanks for all your work as both Director and Artistic Adviser. I trust that you will soon be back to good health and I wish you every success in your literary work.<sup>138</sup>



Walter Macken attended the Board meeting on the 14 June. Dr. Wilmot was in the Chair, also attending were Ernest Blythe and Gabriel Fallon. Riobard O Farachain was unable to attend.

The minute book records:

The first business of the meeting was consideration of Mr. Macken's resignation of his position as Assistant Manager and Artistic Director.

Mr. Macken found the position was taking too much of his time and that in consequence he could not devote sufficient time to his work as a writer. He also found that his health was suffering.

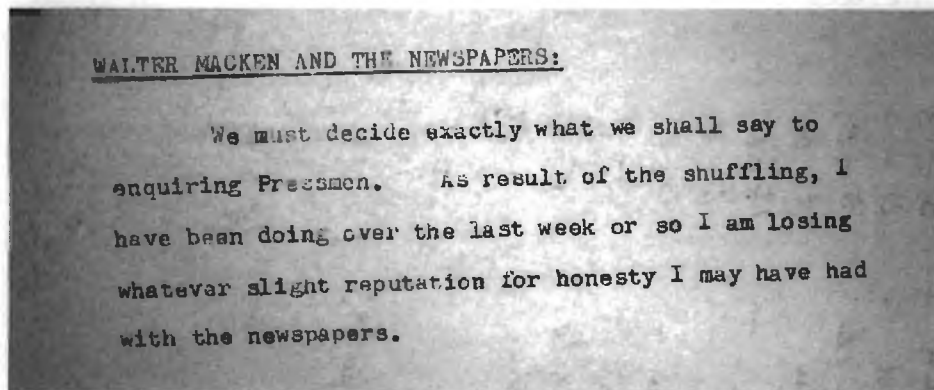
He said he would come to Dublin on Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays and continue to assist in the production of the opening programme *Recall the Years* and also the production of *The Plough and the Stars*.

The invitations to the opening week's performance in the new theatre as well as the speakers, was also discussed and the Board agreed the programme for the Abbey's final weeks at the Queen's Theatre.

Mr Macken and I discussed with Mr. Dermody what is best done during our last three weeks in the Queens with a view to interfering as little as possible with the rehearsal of the first productions planned for our new theatres, while at the same time avoiding the danger of empty houses ...

The final paragraph of the Manager's Report addressed the question of Macken's resignation and what should be said to the Press, **Picture 5.21**.

Picture 5.21



The Board response to this request from Blythe was

...that Mr. Blythe and Mr. Macken should agree on a statement to be issued to the press as coming from the Board of Directors.

Walter Macken did not attend the Board meeting on the 21 June. At that meeting the Manager confirmed that

Walter Macken received a letter from the Minister accepting his resignation, so that he is no longer a member of the Board. I think that it would be both polite and useful to ask him to attend Board meetings while he is at work on *Recall the Years* and supervising the production of *The Plough and the Stars*.

The Board agree that 'Mr. Macken's work with the theatre should end with the production of *The Plough and the Stars* on the 8<sup>th</sup> August.'

The decision to employ a PRO which Blythe and Macken had worked together on was brought to a conclusion when they recommended to the Board the appointment not of an individual but a PR firm, Tower Features. The Board also decided that *Recall the Years* and *The Plough and the Stars* would each have a three week run.

In early July a problem with a cast member in *The Plough and the Stars* emerged. The only player left in the same part was reported as ‘uncooperative.’ Macken and Dermody advised strongly ‘that a replacement be cast and this was agreed by the Board.’

The job of artistic adviser after Macken’s resignation became public was advertised and initially there were no suitable applicants. Attempts to fill this position and that of the assistant manager continued into the autumn.

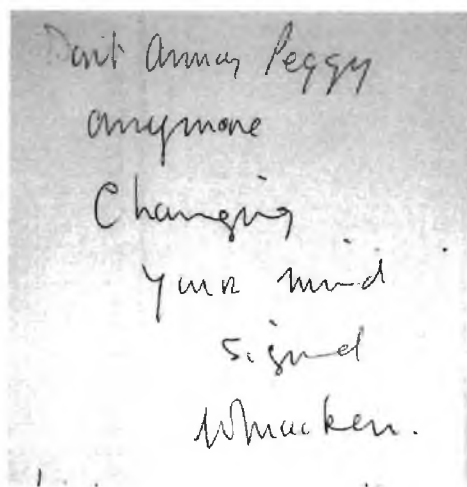
By the 12 July Blythe seem pleased to report that the opening programme was ‘... quite good and intelligible to outsiders...’ and that ‘The idea that we are having an opening week rather than an opening night and that all invitees are equally honoured is on the whole being received very well.’

Once Macken’s resignation became public he received a number of letters of support, some regretting his resignation but all wishing him well for the future. One such letter from his publisher, Macmillan and Co. Limited, wrote encouragingly ‘...you are after all a writer first and always...’ and this must have reinforced Macken’s own feelings expressed in his letter of resignation ‘I am a professional writer; it is what I love most...’

The Macmillan letter and one other letter, from his fellow director, Roibeard Ó Farachain, dated 16 June, are reproduced in **Appendix 5.11**.

It would appear that this was a particularly difficult decision for Macken. The impression from all that has gone before was of a man becoming immersed in his job(s) and yet the resignation did seem to come ‘out of the blue’, surprising many of his immediate colleagues. And yet a handwritten note to himself written on the back of the Ó Farachain letter, the letter dated the 16 June, gives us some understanding of his reluctance and indecision in the situation. Clearly, this was a private note written to himself and was to be his final comment on the matter.<sup>139</sup>

**Picture 5.22**



Utan Macken in *Dreams on Paper* offers an explanation for the resignation as a mix of work pressure and family concern (2009, 425). Also quoted in *Dreams on Paper* is a letter from Macken to his elder son, Fr. Walter Macken, dated 6 September 1966, where he writes in the final paragraph on his Abbey experience

The only regret I have is that I should have said No where I said Yes. I didn't use the nut at the right time. (2009, 427)

Peggy Macken in her *Cursai* interview in 1988 with Utan Macken accounts the same boating incident mentioned in *Dreams on Paper* (425), **Picture 5.23**, and also gave her opinion of his accepting the Abbey job.

When asked was it 'bad for him to come to the Abbey' she responded:

Yes, it was very bad for him. You [Utan] and I were astonished when he said yes to them. But this was all in the plan, he would have done something else if he didn't go to the Abbey. But the Abbey actors used to come to see us every year so the pressure was on, but when he went to the Abbey, the actors and actresses disappointed him and this shattered him...

Picture 5.23: The accident on Loch Corrib

as time went on he said a year and a half or so ago. The two English men Charles Cryton and another kept coming over to talk to us about the film and we went to London to talk to them. They stayed in the hotel in Oughterard when they came to visit us and we all had dinner together. They both had their wives with them. We hired two boats out when they were with us. We had a bit of an accident on the lake and the boat rocked and I fell into the water but my father got in as quickly as possible to save me. That night when he could'nt sleep he kept saying to me 'I'm going to resign from the Abbey.' He had'nt been thinking well before this and I decided to persuade him not to make such a quick decision. He often had the tummy ache then and his mind was'nt at peace.

Tom Kenny collection

Blythe reported his views on the opening programme for the new Abbey Theatre at the Abbey Board meeting on the 9 August. He considered:

*Recall the Years* has been reasonably well received. Some people liked it very well and praised it highly. Others, perhaps the majority seemed to accept it with something of the placid approval with which they accept a sermon. It is the kind of show which has the advantage amongst others that it was not fatally injured by the difficulties experienced at first with some aspects of the mechanics of the theatre ....

While on the 30 August, can be found what may be accepted as Blythe's final word on the opening show and this was 'noted' by the Directors. Under the heading *Recall the Years* he wrote:

Our opening show continued fairly strong till the end although there was a slight decline in attendance during the last week....

Macken's final claim for expenses was also discussed and approved at this meeting. Blythe reminded the Directors that there was a fee also due to Macken 'in connection with *The Plough*' and he thought the bill submitted 'to be high.' The Board resolved this by agreeing 'that Mr. Macken should be paid whatever sum Mr. Blythe considered he was entitled to.'

It was at this meeting that the episode of Walter Macken as an Abbey Director was finally closed. The Minister had nominated Micheal O hAodha as replacement Government representative and this was accepted by the Abbey Board. Throughout September and into October four special meetings of the Abbey Board were held. These resulted in the appointment of Philip O'Kelly as the Assistant Manager under the new title, Deputy Manager (4 October) and Tomás Mac Anna as Artistic Adviser (11 October). At the 4 October meeting the distribution of Walter Macken's shares was completed and by an interesting coincidence the Board accepted 'The proposal to invite Coiril Ó Mathúna of Taibhdhearc na Gaillimhe to become a Shareholder...'  
(Footnote 2.7)

The changes that had been taking place in the Abbey management structure since the players' strike were completed, at least for the time being, with the formal adoption by the Abbey Board of the 'Duties' of the Secretary, Artistic Adviser, Producer and Manager. (Board minutes date 29 November 1966)

*Recall the Years* was Walter Macken's final act as artistic adviser and assistant manager and it is appropriate to mention the reception the 'opening show' received to finally close Macken's time with the Abbey.

It was a multimedia presentation, described in the programme <sup>140</sup> as 'A staged history of the Abbey Theatre from its founding in 1904 to its burning in 1951....'

The programme, in two parts, was based on a number of scenes starting at Coole Park in 1899 and replaying excerpts from some of the Abbey's famous and infamous productions. The programme includes film extracts showing performances of past Abbey actors many of whom made a successful career in film. **Appendix 5.12** is copied from the programme and shows the cast and running order.

The 'Sequence of Scenes' (**Appendix 5.12**, page ii) appears not to reflect the total presentation as outlined in the script. According to the Script, Part 1, available in the

National Library of Ireland <sup>141</sup>, there are seven scenes, the extra one being a ‘comment’ scene set between scenes one and two. In this scene ‘young men’ read letters to the *Daily Nation*, *The Irish Times*, *The Dublin Evening Mail* and the *Freeman’s Journal*, written by persons supporting and in opposition to the Yeats play, *Countess Cathleen*, in 1899.

Extracts from the reviews of the show by the three national papers are in **Appendix.4.11**.

The events of the opening night are reported in some detail by Hunt and Welch.

Hunt describes the production as ‘a hotch-potch of highlights from the theatre’s history’ (1979, 194).

Welch goes into much more detail giving an item by item description of the event and avoided calamities.

It was a race against time for the new Abbey to open on 18 July. All kinds of difficulties surfaced.... A fanfare of trumpets heralded the inauguration of the new theatre and President Eamon de Valera declared it open. Seaghan Barlow...now aged 86, struck the gong... and the programme began. This was *Recall the Years* by Walter Macken... This compilation was intended to reveal the variety of effects which the new theatre was capable of, but as Tomás Mac Anna described it, there were many, unintentionally comic, hitches: the news stopped right in the middle of announcing King Edward's death and Miss Horniman's huff, away back in 1910.... Then the sound went. The performance included staged extracts from, among others, *The Countess Cathleen*, Yeats and Moore's *Diarmuid and Grania*, Russell's *Deirdre*, *Cathleen Ni Houlihan*, *In the Shadow of the Glen*, *Spreading the News*, and *The Playboy*.

(1999, 178)

‘Nevertheless the Abbey had come home’. (Hunt, 1979, 196)

Christopher Murray in his O'Casey biography, *Seán O'Casey: Writer at Work*, (2004, 440), offers in his 'Afterlife' Chapter a different perspective on the choice for the new Abbey's opening programme. He links the old political adversaries, Blythe and de Valera, the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Easter Rising, the blowing up of Nelson's Pillar on 8 March 1966 and the Abbey commitment to have the first play on the new Abbey stage the last play on the old Abbey stage when it burned down on the 18 July 1951.

#### Picture 5.24

This, however, is the new and bland Ireland, in which O'Casey, one side only on view, can easily be accommodated. In 1966, the jubilee year of the Easter Rising, things were a little different. The idea to open the new Abbey in this year was a declaration of its revolutionary status, however shaky. There would have been a certain symmetry in opening the new building with a performance of the same play as had closed the old fifteen years to the day in 1951, *The Plough and the Stars*. But in the year when the men of 1916 were fully honoured and the IRA blew up Nelson's Pillar only a grenade's throw from the theatre it might be thought foolhardy.<sup>2</sup> Besides, it was decided to invite President de Valera officially to open the new building on 18 July: his old enemy Ernest Blythe could hardly ask him to stay on for a play which called his comrades 'cowards'. So Dev was treated to a harmless compilation by Walter Macken entitled *Recall the Years*, and the right speeches could be made by all sides.<sup>3</sup> *The Plough* was postponed for a month. The better part of valour, even in revolutionary theatre, is still discretion.

Murray goes on to mention (2004, 538, Note 2) that the Abbey Directors in an unsigned note in the programme for the August production of the *Plough* wrote that they determined 'long ago' that the O'Casey masterpiece should be the first play to be staged in the new theatre, and that 'they do not regard that resolve as having been nullified by the subsequent decision to open the new Abbey with ... *Recall the Years*'. He further points out (539, Note 3) that one of the scenes in *Recall the Years* was devoted to O'Casey. This was scene 10, **Appendix 5.12**.

Without doubt Blythe was aware of the day to day politics of the times and his immediate concern about who to invite to the opening was resolved by Macken's suggestion for an 'opening week' for the first show. This allowed Blythe and the Board 'to invite all the people who we think have a claim on the theatre' (Page 218). Blythe insisted only on some role for Mr. MacEntee, the former Tanaiste who was the first advocate of the re-building of the Abbey.



Walter Macken's stay at the Abbey Theatre was short but it was not without significance.

There is no one answer to the question 'why' Macken resigned from all his positions at the Abbey. Suggestions from writers, family members, colleagues, tend to point to convenient explanations rather than accepting that such decisions are often arrived at because of one incident, such as the boating accident mentioned in **Picture 5.23** and we must always be aware of the conflict of interest between and within the Abbey jobs with Macken's own desire to write. Of the writers on the Macken resignation, McCann <sup>142</sup> is the only person to state ill-health (1967, 63). Walter Macken was not in good health <sup>143</sup> when he accepted the job. Dowling suggests that accepting the government nomination to the Abbey Board and the position of artistic adviser 'contributed to his early death' (2000, 254). Dowling's comments do, perhaps indirectly, touch on the relationship between Macken and the players. Initially, it would appear that Macken on his appointment to the Board and to the executive positions had the confidence of the players. As we have seen, it was the players that approached Macken about the government nominee position (page 190). On accepting the job Macken '... declared that he would approach his duties in an entirely collaborative manner' (Welsh, 1999, 176).

Referring to **Picture 5.8** (Page 207) we read in Resolution No. 10 Macken's response to his appointment that confirms this intention.

"that the shareholders welcome the appointment of Mr. Walter Macken."

Mr. Macken thanked the meeting and said his task would not be a "one-man-job".

Co-operative effort was essential to creating the right atmosphere.

No one likes change and the Macken, possibly perceived new-broom, approach may have unsettled some of the established players. This would appear to be the case if we are to accept the Dowling comment quoted earlier on the casting of *The Plough and the Stars* and the player unrest mentioned on pages 219 and 227. Could it be that 'bold casting changes' (**Picture 5.17**), changes to rehearsal times and schedules lost Macken the

support of the players? If so, then his resignation as artistic adviser and from his other positions should have surprised no one.

Yet the view expressed by Tomás Mac Anna in a letter written on the 22 October 2009 presents a different picture of the situation <sup>144</sup>. He remembers that the Macken appointment pleased the Company and that they were looking forward to a ‘welcome co-operation with someone who was both playwright and player,’ describing him as ‘one of us.’ They looked to much more consultation and openness between the Company and the Board ‘and indeed Wally was anxious to maintain such cooperation.’ He does not recall any controversy about the casting of *The Plough and the Stars* and thought that at the time there was no change to established practices, rehearsals, etc. With regard to his own position and that of Frank Dermody, whom he described as the senior play director, he said that ‘Wally would meet us of course to inform us of his plans and generally to consult with us.’ On the Macken resignation he wrote that ‘The players were very disappointed.’

McCann wrote on Walter Macken’s short stay at the Abbey:

It was Walter Macken who on his return to the Abbey ....was to redress an old grievance which had caused many a big Abbey row. He began to bring back Abbey-trained actors who had left the theatre under threat.... This, he hoped, was to be the first hill climb on the long road back to the greatness of the Abbey ... (1967, 63). (Footnote 5.4)

According to Welch, ‘...the intention was that Walter Macken succeed Earnest Blythe as managing director (1999, 212) and this we now know had been accepted by Blythe.

When reflecting on all that happened to him since his appointment as the government nominee on the Abbey Board and his acceptance of the positions of assistant manager

**Footnote 5.4:** McCann, Sean, ed. *The Story of the Abbey Theatre* is in six chapters with the following authors: 1. Sean McCann, *The Beginning*, 2. Anthony Butler, *The Guardians*, 3. Sean McCann, *The Theatre Itself*, 4. Catherine Rynne, *The Playwrights*, 5. Gabriel Fallon, *The Abbey Theatre Acting Tradition*, 6. Donal Dorcey, *The Big Occasion*.

and artistic adviser he must have been disappointed with the outcomes. It appears certain that the enthusiasm he brought to the jobs and his own professed affection for the Abbey was affected by the responses of some of the players and this may have been coupled with other internal problems, such as that mentioned in Blythe's letter of the 4 June (Picture 5.19) where he wrote: 'As it is your creation [*Recall the Years*] and as there might be difficulties in getting co-operation between Tomás MacAnna and Frank Dermody...'

At this distance from the events it is impossible to decide what the difficulties were. The personnel ones could have been reinforced by the pressure to remain living in the West of Ireland and it was this indecision that led to his 'note' to himself reproduced in Picture 5.22. Then there is the question of his health. I believe there were some health problems but that his state of health was not the only issue.

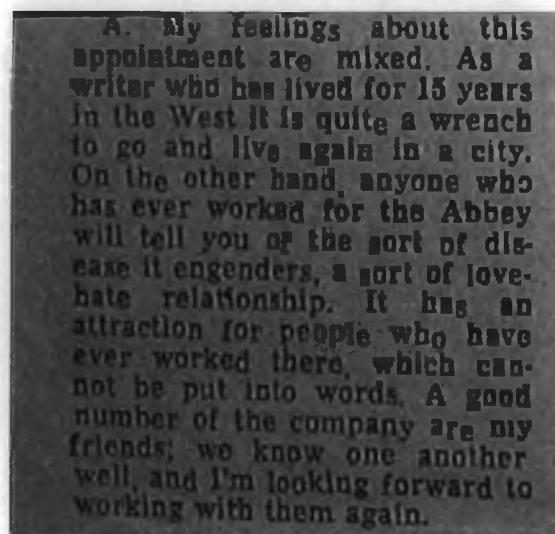
Reflecting on his own words and the words said and written about him and his positions at the Abbey can only lead us to this conclusion. 'Tatler' wrote on the 1 July 1965 (Picture 5.2) that 'Mr. Macken has a profound interest and love for the Abbey ...'

Macken in his letter to Ernest Blythe dated the 23 July 1965 wrote 'I had intended to go and reside in Dublin for a few years to gather atmosphere for a future book...' He ends that letter with the following paragraph:

I am genuine in my desire to be of some help to you. I think it is because once one has worked for the Abbey (however much we vilify it in light conversation) one contacts a sort of bug that remains buried in the system which becomes active at peculiar times. (Picture 5.3)

Finally, in an undated interview in December 1965 on his coming appointment as the Abbey's artistic adviser we read: Picture 5.25(a) <sup>145</sup>

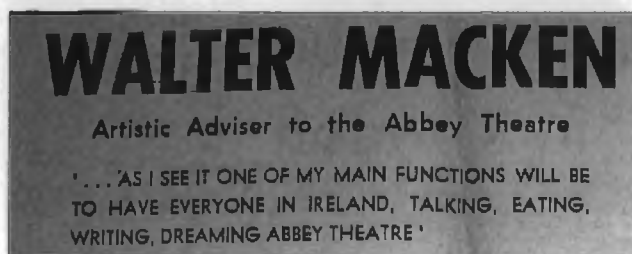
Picture 5.25(a)



A. My feelings about this appointment are mixed. As a writer who has lived for 15 years in the West it is quite a wrench to go and live again in a city. On the other hand, anyone who has ever worked for the Abbey will tell you of the sort of disease it engenders, a sort of love-hate relationship. It has an attraction for people who have ever worked there, which cannot be put into words. A good number of the company are my friends; we know one another well, and I'm looking forward to working with them again.

This interview was under the following banner headline, **Picture 5.25(b)**, and is reproduced in full in **Appendix 5.13**.

Picture 5.25(b)



**WALTER MACKEN**  
Artistic Adviser to the Abbey Theatre  
'... AS I SEE IT ONE OF MY MAIN FUNCTIONS WILL BE  
TO HAVE EVERYONE IN IRELAND, TALKING, EATING,  
WRITING, DREAMING ABBEY THEATRE '

In parallel with all of this must have been the pressure of handling the expectation of others. Especially those interested to see change at the Abbey that would encourage new writings and recover much of the writings of Irish playwrights that had previously been rejected. An unequivocal example of this is the letter written to Walter Macken in August 1965 by Robert Hogan <sup>146</sup>. The letter is reproduced in full in **Appendix 5.14**.

Paragraph 2 of that letter opens as follows and the letter goes on to list more than 60 titles not including the groups of plays mentioned, such as the later O'Casey plays and those by Paul Vincent Carroll and Denis Johnston and others.

**Picture 5.26(a)**

I've listed plays that I think are good enough to be revived by long established dramatists, as well as new plays by new men. I also listed a bunch of plays not originally done by the Abbey but that could well be taken over into the national repertoire as much for their own worth as for encouraging their authors to write for the Abbey. The list reflects my own prejudice

The letter displays an enthusiasm that the Abbey succeed under Macken's leadership that he may have seen as flattering and daunting. Receiving it in the late summer of 1965 must have given Macken the encouragement to believe that he could make a difference. The inclusion by Hogan towards the end of the letter of three of Macken's own plays also placed him and his work as a playwright at the centre of a hoped for revitalisation of the theatre.

**Picture 5.26(b)**

And, of course, I would revive all I could of Molloy and of yourself. I'd do FRIDAY'S MEN & THE VISITING HOUSE especially. And, of yours, I'd certainly do DOOLIN & VACANT POSSESSION & TWILIGHT OF A WARRIOR.

Great Scott, have I forgotten JOHN BULL'S OTHER ISLAND?

Well, this is probably enough. I really think there is God's plenty here of brilliant or first-rate or -- in no pejorative sense -- very fine sendnd-rate work. Enough superb stuff to really revitalize a theatre, if enough of it were done. I hope I haven't sounded too didactic, especially too you, for you know enormously more about the theatre than I.

Unfortunately, the politics of the situation did not appear to sustain major change in the short term and this encouragement may well have wilted in the face of opposition to even modest change.

All of this points to Macken as a man torn between a position of prominence that he desired and believed in and his life-style in the West of Ireland. His was an isolated life-style with, in the previous 15 years, times occasionally spent away from the West on his other work, his films, radio and TV work. He may also have been aware that it had been more than 15 years since he managed people and that that experience was confined to his time at the Taibhdhearc.

The personnel problems that plagued the Abbey before his arrival have already been mentioned and were well known, and the players sensing the removal of the 'dictatorial' hand of Ernest Blythe may have placed Walter Macken in an almost impossible position. He took what he saw at the time as the only sensible way out, he resigned and returned to Galway.

He was not to know that even in his short time as artistic adviser his contribution to the future development of the Abbey was in accepting the 'compromise position' (Welch, 1999, 213). This did result in some changes to practices in the Abbey and directly to the establishment of the position of Artistic Director.

The artistic adviser's position passed through the hands of Tomás Mac Anna and Alan Simpson before Hugh Hunt's insistence on accepting the position in December 1969, that he be designated Artistic Director.

Walter Macken died suddenly on the 22 April 1967 at his home in Menlo, Co. Galway.

According to a letter written by Mrs. Nora O'Beirne on behalf of the Sligo Literary Society, Walter Macken was invited to address the society at a public lecture to be held in the Grand Hotel, Sligo, during April 1967 on a topic of his own choosing. The agreed date for the talk was the 23 April 1967 and he had intended to travel to Sligo on that day to fulfil this speaking engagement.<sup>147</sup>

His death was reported with shock and dismay throughout the country and overseas. *The Boston Globe*, 27 April 1967, headlined their obituary 'Death of Playwright Mourned.' *The Evening Press* on the 22 April described him as a 'Towering Personality in the World of Irish Theatre.' *The Sunday Independent* headline read 'His Death Shocks Literary World.' *The Connacht Tribune* on the 28 April described him as 'one of the outstanding figures of his time in the Irish Theatre and a novelist of world stature.' It would appear that many other paper in the country and elsewhere carried tribute to him. **Appendix 0.6**

provided a list of obituaries and appreciations that appeared in the some of the papers at the time.

In his *Last Will and Testament*, though written towards the end of 1952, he describes himself as ‘Author and Playwright.’<sup>148</sup>

His final novel *Brown Lord of the Mountain* was published one month before his death. Of his known plays at the time, two, *Merchants Road* and *The Last Gentleman* remained unperformed and unpublished, and his musical *God’s Own Country* remained unfinished. After his death his second book for children, *Flight of the Doves*, was published in 1968 and his third book of short stories *The Coll Doll and other Stories* was published in 1969 [*The Coll Doll* contains 5 new short stories, the remaining 13 stories are from *The Green Hills and other Stories* published in 1956].

## References:

- <sup>120</sup> Dowling, Vincent. *Astride the Moon, A Theatrical Life*, Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 2000
- <sup>121</sup> BUW Folder 16
- <sup>122</sup> BUW Folder 13
- <sup>123</sup> ibid
- <sup>124</sup> BUW Folder 16
- <sup>125</sup> BUW Folder 13
- <sup>126</sup> ibid
- <sup>127</sup> ibid
- <sup>128</sup> ibid
- <sup>129</sup> ibid
- <sup>130</sup> ibid
- <sup>131</sup> The Abbey Theatre Programmes for *Emer agus an Laoch*, 28 December 1995 and *The Hall of Healing* by Sean O'Casey in a double bill with *Yerma* by Federico Garcia Lorca, 28 February 1966 are part of the Abbey Papers: Bay 1TH, Dublin City Library and Archives. *The Hall of Healing* with *Yerma* were revived and opened on the 25 April 1966, the dates reported in McCann, 1967, 98 and Hunt, 1979, 268)
- <sup>132</sup> BUW Folder 13
- <sup>133</sup> ibid
- <sup>134</sup> ibid
- <sup>135</sup> Abbey Theatre Programme for *The Plough and the Stars*, 22 August 1966, Abbey Papers: Bay 1TH, Dublin City Library and Archives.
- <sup>136</sup> BUW Folder 13
- <sup>137</sup> ibid
- <sup>138</sup> ibid
- <sup>139</sup> ibid
- <sup>140</sup> National Library of Ireland: Main Library, call no. Ir 820 p 93, *Recall the Years*, programme.
- <sup>141</sup> National Library of Ireland: MS 29,555. *Recall the Years*, Script for Part 1
- <sup>142</sup> McCann, Sean, ed. *The Story of the Abbey Theatre*. London: The New English Library Limited, 1967.
- <sup>143</sup> Ultan Macken, *Dreams on Paper*, pages 435, 439, 441
- <sup>144</sup> I spoke with Tomás Mac Anna a number of times on the phone about my work. We agree that I would send him the questions that I would like him to answer. Mac Anna's professional life overlapped Macken's two periods at the Abbey. His letter in reply to my questions is dated the 22 October 2009 and will be referred to in Chapter 7.
- <sup>145</sup> BUW Folder 12
- <sup>146</sup> BUW Folder 16
- <sup>147</sup> BUW Folder 18
- <sup>148</sup> BUW Folder 20



## Chapter 6

### The Playwright

Great art, we know, is universal, but, before it is universal, it has to be thoroughly local, it has to bear the signature of a people and a way of life.

(Bentley, 1957, 19) <sup>149</sup>

In the 'Background' to this work (page 2) I mentioned identifying eleven plays written by Walter Macken and commented on other writings that made some reference to the known Macken plays. Only Hogan in *After the Irish Renaissance* (1968, 66) describes five of the plays and mentions by title two others. The plays not described by Hogan are *Look in the Looking Glass*, performed by the Abbey Theatre in 1958 and *The Last Gentleman*, written about 1960. In Hogan's *Dictionary of Irish Literature*, (1996, 774 – 775), his reference to the Macken works amounts to the following and this includes four of the plays.

#### Picture: 6.1

WORKS: *Mungo's Mansion*. London: Macmillan, 1946. (Play); *Quench the Moon*. London: Macmillan, 1948/New York: Viking, 1948. (Novel); *Vacant Possession*. London: Macmillan, 1948. (Play); *I Am Alone*. London: Macmillan, 1949. (Novel); *Rain on the Wind*. London: Macmillan, 1950. (Novel); *The Bogman*. London: Macmillan, 1952. (Novel); *Home Is the Hero*. London: Macmillan, 1953. (Play); *Sunset on the Window-Panes*. London: Macmillan, 1954. (Novel); *The Green Hills and Other Stories*. London: Macmillan, 1956; *Twilight of a Warrior*. London: Macmillan, 1956. (Play); *Sullivan*. London: Macmillan, 1957. (Novel); *Seek the Fair Land*. London: Macmillan, 1959. (Novel); *God Made Sunday and Other Stories*. London: Macmillan, 1962; *The Silent People*. London: Macmillan, 1962. (Novel); *The Scorching Wind*, London: Macmillan, 1964; *Island of the Great Yellow Ox*. London: Macmillan, 1966; *Brown Lord of the Mountain*. London: Macmillan, 1967; *The Coll Doll and Other Stories*. Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1969; *The Flight of the Doves*. London: Pan, 1971. REFERENCES: Drees, Roswitha. "Die Darstellung irischer Geschichte im Erzählwerk Walter Mackens." Diss., Wuppertal, 1982; Hogan, Robert. *After the Irish Renaissance*. Minneapolis: University Press, pp. 65–70

The only record of the Macken plays written in the Irish language can be found in Ó' Siadhail (1993, 113)

I have now established that Walter Macken as a playwright has to his credit 35 titles. This list includes his published plays and those plays publicly performed but unpublished.

Excluding his verse drama, poetic drama, a *Son et Lumiere*, written in 1962, his unfinished musical, *God's Own Country* (unfinished at the time of his death in 1967), his multi-media presentation, *Recall the Years*, scripted for the opening of the new Abbey Theatre in 1966, the total is 21 plays. This includes some short plays. Macken also re-titles some of his plays. Where this is identified, the plays are grouped together and treated as one play.

A list of the 35 works can be found in **Appendix 6.1**.

**Table 6.1** lists the known Irish language and English language plays. The known plays are the published plays and those unpublished but performed, with the years each was published or first produced. This separate list is intended to establish what could be considered as the known starting point for any description of the Macken output as a playwright.

**Table 6.1**

Year	Title
1943	<i>An Cailín Aimsire Abú</i>
1943	<i>Bhí Mac Agam Tráth</i>
1944	<i>An Fear ón Spidéal.</i>
1944	<i>Oighreacht na Mara</i>
1946	<i>Mungo's Mansion</i>
1948	<i>Vacant Possession</i>
1952	<i>Home is the Hero</i>
1955	<i>Twilight of a Warrior</i>
1958	<i>Look in the Looking Glass</i>
1960	<i>The Voices of Doolin</i>

**Appendix 6.1** establishes that Macken started his writing for the theatre before 1943 and that his unknown plays are spread throughout the years up to at least 1963.

In this chapter all the Macken plays are described. As far as possible, they are presented in chronological order so that the changes to the style of writing and content will emerge naturally. Where there are adequate published descriptions of the known Macken plays I

have avoided duplicating this, paraphrasing it or otherwise rewriting it and refer to the source of such descriptions with only supplementary comments where necessary.

Three theses on Macken's dramatic output have been identified. (Footnote 6.1)

(1) The earliest is a thesis by Martina Bachler-Walter completed in 1994 and titled 'Walter Macken and the Irish Theatre: A Portrait of an Artist of the People (1994)'.<sup>150</sup> A copy of this thesis is in the National Library of Ireland.<sup>151</sup>

Bachler-Walter concludes her introduction

....emphasising once more that the main object of this work is to analyse the life and drama of an Irish playwright who has unfortunately been neglected by the professional critics despite his numerous achievements for the Irish theatre. Walter Macken is certainly not the only Irish playwright in that respect, but he caught my attention because of his versatility which made a detailed analysis worthwhile. In my work I will aim at painting a picture of a man who devoted an important part of his life not only to playwriting, but also to various other activities linked to the Irish Theatre. A detailed study of Walter Macken's theatrical experience will, in that sense, not only help to enlighten about the playwright's life and work, but also give a general idea about certain aspects of Irish theatre of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. (Thesis, page 7)

Her main source for her thesis was the Macken papers at the University in Wuppertal. She confined her analysis to the four published Macken plays and the two performed plays, *Look in the looking Glass* (1958) and *The Voices of Doolin* (1960). We will return to her observations in the next chapter.

**Foot note 6.1** The study quoted by Robert Hogan (Picture 6.1) written by Roswitha Drees, 'Die Darstellung irischer Geschichte im Erzählwerk Walter Mackens' is about Macken's historical novels.<sup>152(a)</sup> A somewhat similar work was written by Monica Ann le Blanc in 1988 with the title 'An Introduction to Contemporary Novels of Walter Macken'.<sup>152(b)</sup>

(2) The second study was done by Annegret Feld-Nüßler in 1995 and is based solely on the Wuppertal papers. Her work is entitled 'Das Dramatische Werk Walter Mackens', (1995).<sup>153</sup>

In her Chapter III, Feld-Nüßler grouped the Macken plays by 'theme or stylistic feature.' She established five groups and these were: the comedies, the realistic problem plays, plays of ideas, historical plays and finally Macken's modern-life plays. This work, based on the materials in the Wuppertal archive, is important in that it provides a written record of part of the contents of the archive as well as 'a first complete analysis of Walter Macken's dramatic work'. The Abstract further states:

It [the study] concentrates on Macken's produced and/ or published plays as well as on the up to now unknown plays and manuscripts of the Walter Macken Collection in the Wuppertal University Library.

The thesis, being available only in German, has passed virtually unknown in Ireland and in the English speaking world.

(3) The third study, an MA Thesis, by Emily O'Flaherty, National University of Ireland Galway, has the title 'Home is the Hero? The Published Plays of Walter Macken'.<sup>154</sup> This work, as confirmed by the title, deals only with the four plays published in English, *Mungo's Mansion* (1946), *Vacant Possession* (1948), *Twilight of a Warrior* (1952) and *Home is the Hero* (1955). This is a useful piece of work and includes a good introduction to Macken's background and early life.

It can be stated that these theses, because of their content, two in a limited way, are good companion pieces to this study that aims to provide a detailed and complete account of Walter Macken's contribution to Irish theatre as an actor, playwright and theatre manager.

## The Plays of Walter Macken

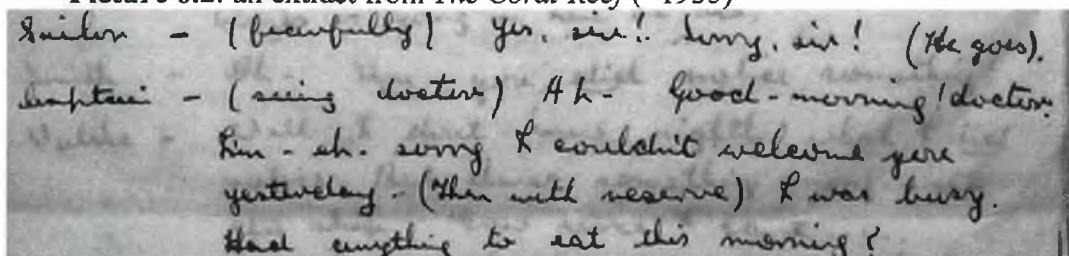
Walter Macken wrote plays both in Irish and English. We will see that English versions of some of his popular Irish plays predate the final Irish language version. Where no English version of an Irish play exists, we may assume that the play was written only in Irish. There are two such plays, *Bhí Mac Agam Tráth* and *Oighreacht na Mara*.

### 1. (a) *The Coral Reef*, (b) *An Sceir Criobheil*

The first play presented as a Macken play in the Wuppertal archive is *The Coral Reef* (BUW Folder 23), is a one act play, in two scenes. Written possibly during the 1930s (my guess would be the mid-1930s'). The manuscript is handwritten and there is also a typed Irish version, *An Sceir Criobheil*.

The handwritten copy is neat and, assuming the work is Macken's, the neatness could indicate that the writer was still at school or recently left school. Macken left school in 1934. The handwriting compare favourably to the extract taken from *Ceart agus Cúiteamh* written in pencil about 1934 (see **Picture 1.5**).

**Picture 6.2:** an extract from *The Coral Reef* (~1935)



The script contains some basic writing errors and the play's plot is thin and unbelievable. The play is set on board ship. The main characters are the Captain, the First Mate and the newly appointed ship's Doctor. They are supported by ten sailors.

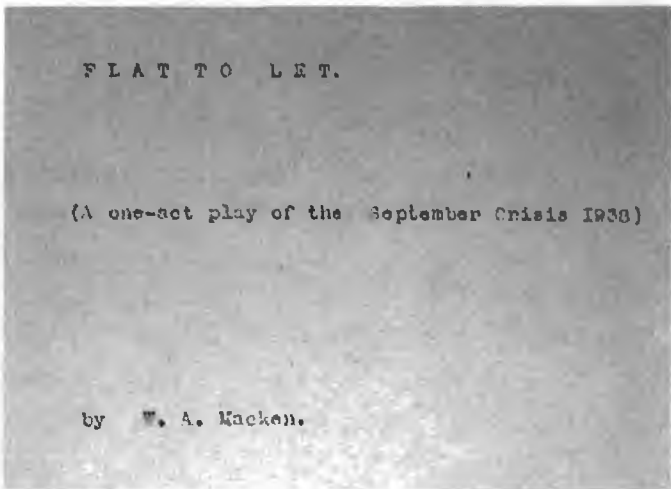
The story concerns the ship making a voyage to a location where the Captain had lost a ship some 35 years earlier. That disaster happened at an unknown and uncharted coral

reef. The Captain had been ridiculed throughout his career as a result. Now at the end of his working life he is determined to prove his story by destroying his present ship, *The Magdalena*, and its crew. He intends to run the ship onto the reef. The doctor is on his first voyage and the bulk of the conversation is between the three main characters. Conversations between the First Mate and the Doctor focus on the Captain's intention and state of mind while any conversation with the Captain revolves around his intention to destroy the ship. It is a naive piece of writing but interesting as Macken's first extant play.

**2. *Flat to Let.***

The play is set in 1938 and the writing date is likely to be 1939. The play was submitted to the Abbey Theatre and the reading committee (**Footnote 2.9**) listed the play 'to be returned' in its report to the Board on the 15 March 1940. At that time the reports to the Abbey Board listed only the play titles and these were recorded in the minutes. There is no mention of any author's name. The inclusion of the author's name with the play title of 'returned' plays became common practice about 1943 (NFC 98, Volume 8).

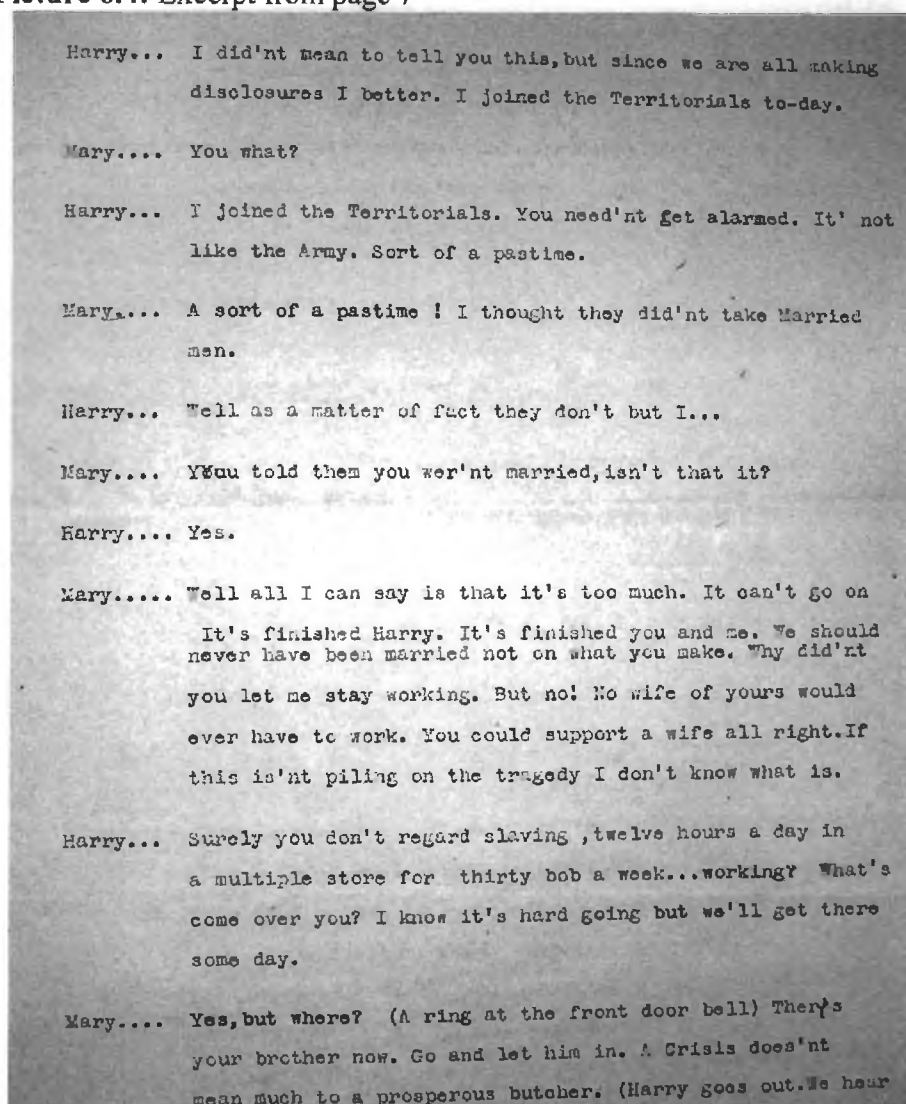
**Picture 6.3:** Title from the front cover of the Manuscript (BUW Manuscript Nr. 52, BUW Folder 23 contains a part copy, 10 pages).



The play is type-written, 18 foolscap pages, and set in a London suburb at 9.00 p.m. on the 28 September 1938. It has a cast of three men and two women.

The play revolves around a young married couple, Harry and Mary Lovelock. He, an unsuccessful but optimistic insurance sales man, has joined the Territorial Army. Mary is clearly disturbed by this and by her recently confirmed pregnancy which she has just announced to Harry. She gave up her job at her husband's insistence when they married. Family finance is a major concern for her and this financial uncertainty reinforced by her pregnancy is now added to her fear of the impending war.

**Picture 6.4: Excerpt from page 7**



Harry... I didn't mean to tell you this, but since we are all making disclosures I better. I joined the Territorials to-day.

Mary.... You what?

Harry... I joined the Territorials. You need'nt get alarmed. It's not like the Army. Sort of a pastime.

Mary.... A sort of a pastime ! I thought they didn't take married men.

Harry... Well as a matter of fact they don't but I...

Mary.... You told them you weren't married, isn't that it?

Harry.... Yes.

Mary..... Well all I can say is that it's too much. It can't go on. It's finished Harry. It's finished you and me. We should never have been married not on what you make. Why didn't you let me stay working. But no! No wife of yours would ever have to work. You could support a wife all right. If this isn't piling on the tragedy I don't know what is.

Harry... Surely you don't regard slaving, twelve hours a day in a multiple store for thirty bob a week...working? What's come over you? I know it's hard going but we'll get there some day.

Mary.... Yes, but where? (A ring at the front door bell) There's your brother now. Go and let him in. A Crisis doesn't mean much to a prosperous butcher. (Harry goes out. He hears

The action of the play takes place during one evening. Harry and Mary are preparing to entertain Harry's successful brother, a butcher, and his wife, when into their lives blunders a government official to fit them for gas masks.

The play has clear parallels with Macken's own life and with his novel *I am alone*,<sup>155</sup> published in 1949. Macken and his wife moved to London in 1937 where he worked as an insurance salesman. The Macken family returned to Ireland in 1939 with their first son, Wallyóg, born in 1938. (Macken, 2009, 128)

The play seems interesting and worthy of production. It shows the tensions of the times, ominously established by the sounds of over-flying aircraft. The play also reflects in many ways the lack of understanding by men for the concerns of women. Harry's easy and casual ways, his thoughtlessness and indifference place all the burdens for the family on Mary who is unable to cope.

Macken submitted the play to the BBC in late 1939 or early 1940. Considering that the Second World War was underway and the play's subject matter, it is no surprise to find that the play was rejected. The rejection letter dated 8 May 1940 was sent to Macken's Galway address, (BUW Folder 75).

### **3. *Uncle Peter***

This is a one Act comedy with a cast of seven men, five women. It is typed 18 page manuscript. The play has never been performed and there is no indication when it was written. (BUW Manuscript Nr. 71)

The action revolves around a winning Sweepstake ticket bought by the now deceased Uncle Peter and the antics of the many family members to find where it is hidden so as to claim the £25,000.



#### Picture 6.5

if it's not in the house, where is it? ...  
Uncle Peter felt he hadn't long to live, he may have given it to somebody who would give it to us later. This somebody was to give it to us when he saw in the papers that the ticket had won a first prize and that Uncle Peter was dead. Right? Now, if that's the case why hasn't that somebody come forward? Because, obviously he just didn't give it to somebody to come forward. What's the alternative? That he just gave the ticket away? If so, wouldn't the person have come forward before this to claim the money? Surely they just wouldn't keep a winning ticket rotting in their pockets?

Matthew is almost correct and the hiding place is finally revealed when a letter arrives giving its whereabouts.

Biddy, an older family member, who had been charged to lay-out Uncle Peter, confirms their worst fears and with the hiding place discovered the recriminations begin.

#### Picture 6.6 (from page 16)

BIDDY (cooly.) It was Miss Martha and Mister Mark here that told me sir.  
"We can't afford a habit for him," they said, "Pack his corpse into the shabbiest suit he had," they says. So I did.  
LUKE So the ticket A D 18000.....  
MATTHEW Is in the grave with him.

This short play is an incredible piece, a romp, but non-the-less enjoyable and could be of interest to amateur theatre groups. Macken was to return to the Sweepstake ticket in his 1946 play, *Mungo's Mansion*.

#### 4. (a) *An Cailín Aimsire Abu*, (b) *Lucy Callaghan's Father* (c) *Salute the Servant*

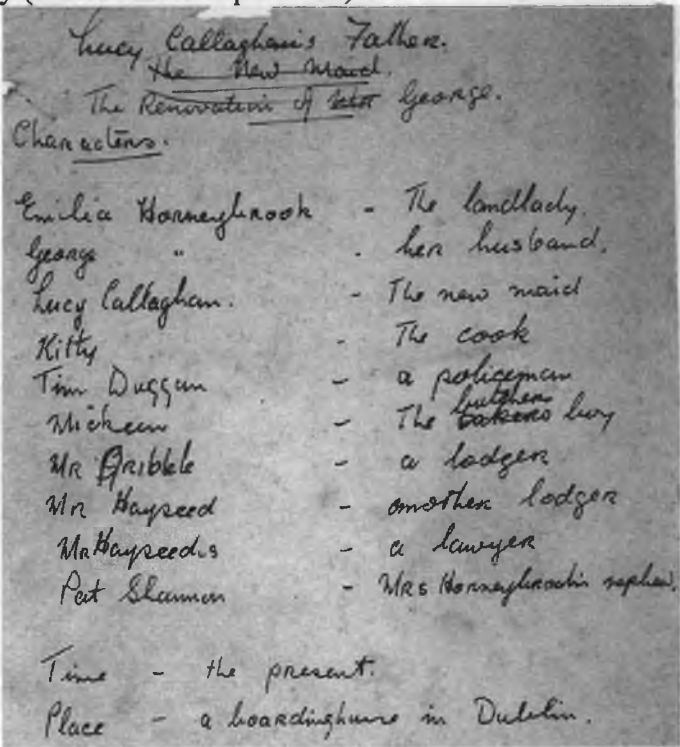
*An Cailín Aimsire Abú* was published in Dublin by Oifig an tSoláthair in 1953<sup>156</sup>. The play was first produced at Taibhdhearc na Gaillimhe in September 1943. It was revived in October 1946. Walter Macken directed the play on both occasions and also played one

of the main characters, Seóirse. The play later played at the Taibhdhearc in 1958, 1966 and 1982.

The published version of the play is a translation of an earlier work, *Lucy Callaghan's Father* (BUW Manuscript Nr.58). It would appear that *Lucy Callaghan's Father* was submitted to the Abbey Theatre about 1941 and rejected by Ernest Blythe. A rejection letter, dated 7 February 1942, for a later Macken play, *Rude Forefathers*, itself to be revised and published as *An Fear ón Spidéal*, contained within the criticism the comment that an earlier play, unfortunately unnamed, was ‘... a very successful attempt at a farce...’ All the indications are that the earlier play was *Lucy Callaghan's Father*. The letter is reproduced in **Picture 6.11** and we will discuss this in the context of the play, *An Fear ón Spidéal*, and its forerunners later in this chapter.

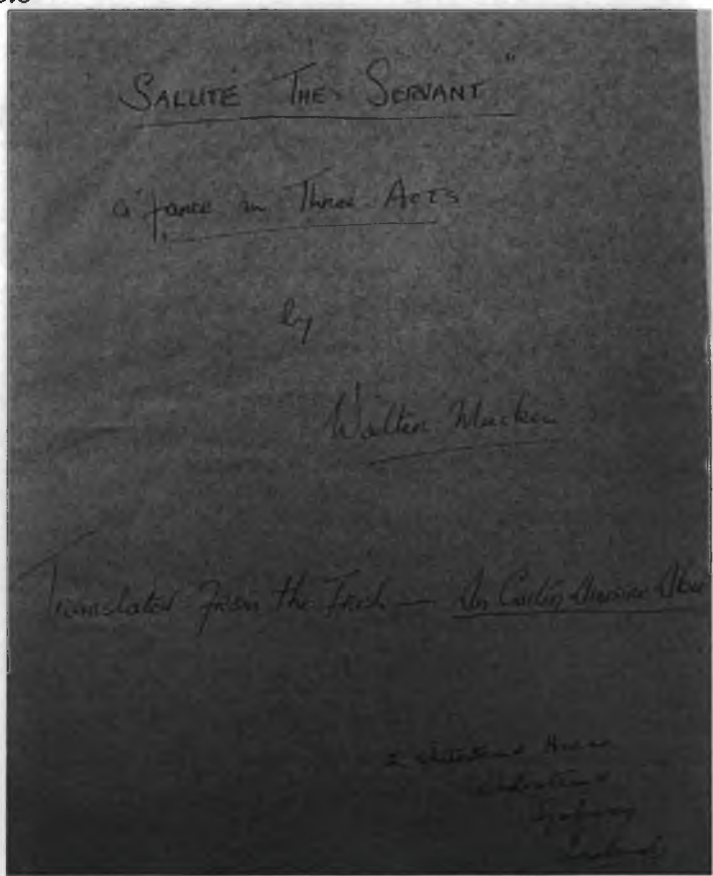
The third version of *An Cailín Aimsire Abú* was the translation back to English and called *Salute the Servant*.

**Picture 6.7** shows the cast for *Lucy Callaghan's Father* and other possible titles for the play (BUW Manuscript Nr. 66).



The redrafting of *Lucy Callaghan's Father* resulted in the dropping of two of the characters, Mickeen and Pat Shannon, and the play was then translated into Irish as *An Cailín Aimsire Abú*. The retranslation back to English according to the play's title page was done by Macken and indicates that *Salute the Servant* post dates *An Cailín Aimsire Abú*. Inspection of these scripts shows that whatever minor writing changes may have taken place the plot remained unchanged.

Picture 6.8



*An Cailín Aimsire Abú* is a farce in 3-Acts with a cast of five men and three women.

The play is set in Dublin or in any big town in Ireland. Moving the location from Dublin would require some readjustments to the script due to the specific references to Dublin in the writing. It concerns George/ Seóirse, a writer of crime novels who likes to try out his theories in practice before including them in his books. This practice results in bizarre

and unacceptable behaviour by George that cause his wife, Emilia/ Nóra, much annoyance and frustration:

....You became a writer in a night. You were taken out of a public house brawl in a drunken condition last March. You said you wanted atmosphere for a book. You assaulted a dock labourer the following May, and spent two weeks in hospital. More atmosphere for a book.... (Act 1, page 7)

An earlier incident, again for 'atmosphere', occurred between George and the housemaid and resulted in the maid losing her job and being replaced by the new maid, Lucy Callaghan, An Cailín Aimsire of the play.

George's wife, Emilia, has taken in two lodgers to give herself something to do. It is not a poor household and as well as the maid there is a cook. The cook has a Garda boyfriend. George propositions the Garda to assist with a staged burglary of £500 from one of the lodgers, justified as 'atmosphere' for George and investigation practice for the Garda.

Into this situation comes a lawyer, Mr. Mullins, to inform Lucy that her Uncle has left her

... the residue of his estate, when certain obligations had first been met. You will therefore receive a legacy of twenty thousand pounds, approx.... (Act 2, page 13)

But Lucy's mother is ill and this money will not clear probate in time to pay for her essential hospital treatment. Emilia decides to advance Lucy the money to cover the hospital charge. George has earlier described Emilia as: '... too soft. You with all your shrewdness and perspicacity are the ideal recipient for the tale of woe'. (Act 1, page 6)

The hospital story is a confidence trick and it is George that saves Emilia from the tricksters, Lucy and Mullins. George solves the real robbery and recovers the missing £500 stolen by Mullins.

All of you have regarded my actions during the past few years as being senseless and unfruitful but they have at least given me the acumen to recognise a crook when I see one.

(Act 3, page 36)

Taibhdhearc na Gaillimhe, acknowledging the lack of Irish speakers in its audiences, always provided a synopsis in English of the plays they performed. The Taibhdhearc 'Synopsis' for the 1943 production of *Cailín Aimsire Abú* is reproduced in **Appendix 6.2** and provides a fuller account of the action.

This is a good play. It is sufficiently uncomplicated to be interesting and is entertaining. The characters have sufficient depth to carry the action. The parts of George, Lucy (*An Cailín Aimsire*) and Mullins, the solicitor, require particular attention as all live 'double lives'.

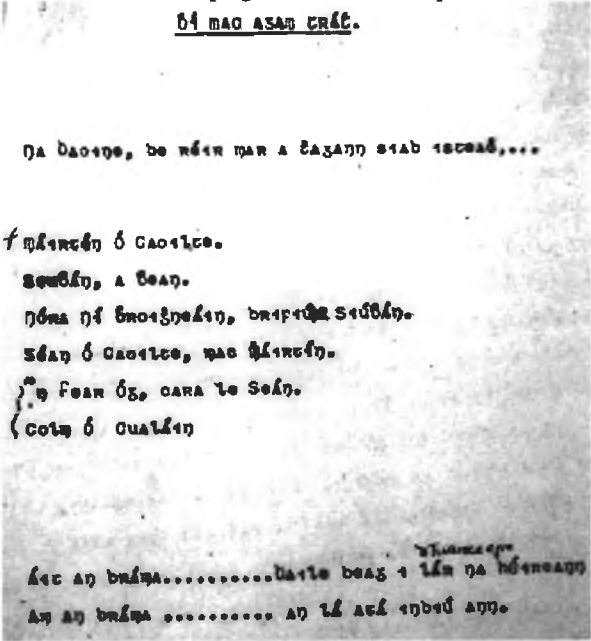
In my opinion the play, apart from the over-writing, has one glaring fault that arises towards the end. The admission by George that he is the anonymous author of a successful series of crime novels comes three pages too soon and made the final pages unnecessary. There is no need for this to happen. George has solved the mystery of the missing money from the staged robbery (Act 2) and he, aided by Tim Duggan, the Garda, has exposed the confidence tricksters, Lucy and Mullins. The revelation of his authorship at this point is unnecessary. George is the hero of the moment and with a minimum of rearrangement, George's admission that he is also the successful author can be transferred to the final lines of the play. This is the reconciliation scene between George and Emilia. (Footnote 6.2)

**Footnote 6.2:** I directed the Holding Court Theatre Group, an amateur company, attached to the Axis Theatre, Ballymun, Dublin 9 ([www.axis-ballymun.ie](http://www.axis-ballymun.ie)) in a successful production of *Salute the Servant* for five performances from 5 to 9 May 2009. Flaws within the script were immediately obvious during rehearsals and the final version used the revised ending. It was also necessary to cut parts of the dialogue. The revision for this production was kept to a minimum. As revised it was a long show, running about two hours, ten minutes. Though well received by the audiences the script should be cut for any further performances. It is somewhat repetitive and this has a detrimental effect on the pace. The entertainment would benefit from such a revision without taking from the story. The revised ending works. Ultan Macken (Walter Macken's son) attended the Thursday night performance and participated in the after-show discussion. I have his permission for a full revision of the play at some later date.

5. *Bhí Mac Agam Tráth*

This is a short play (21 pages) with a cast of four men and two women. The play was written in 1943 and had its only performance at Taibhdhearc na Gaillimhe for Litheas Órga Chonradh na Gaeilge on the 17 October 1943. The Wuppertal archive has a full script in Manuscript Folder Nr. 105. Folder Nr. 75 has just 15 pages with a cast/title page. The action takes place over one evening in the sitting room of the Ó Caoilte house. There are two scenes separated by about two hours.

Picture 6.9: The title and cast page from the script.



The play is set in a midland town and concerns the Ó Caoilte parents, Siubhán and Máirtín and their adult son Séan. The town has suffered from a number of recent robberies. Máirtín remarks, ‘It’s shameful that this town of ours is always in the news these days’ (Page 11). The locals would like to blame the IRA but the Gardaí suspect a well organised local gang.

The family is well off. Séan is their only child. Nóra, Siubhán sister, is visiting the family. She is a shopkeeper and the mother of two adult children, the elder at college. In contrast, Séan Ó Caoilte is supported by his family. As Siubhán explains to Nóra ‘We

have enough money. There's no need for him to do any work. And he writes as well. He had a few articles in the *Independent*' (Page 4). Siubhán is proud of her son, he is popular but at the same time she is worried about his late nights and his life style.

Nóra notices Séan's expensive tastes in clothes and comments on this as well as on his gold cigarette case. Séan does not get on with Nóra. Séan is to inherit the family home and money but he has now outgrown his allowance and to maintain his life style he has turned to crime.

The first scene takes place about tea-time when Séan leaves the house to meet friends. In the second scene, about two hours later, Séan returns in distress. He is armed with a pistol and wounded. His planned attack on a Post Office van had been anticipated by the Gardaí and in the shoot-out, his two accomplices were killed and he has been shot in the hand. He is being pursued by the Gardaí. He blames his parents for his plight, claiming they gave him all the money he needed when he was younger but did not provide for his present life style and that is what caused him to turn to crime. (Footnote 6.3)

*Bhí Mac Agam Tráth* is a simple play, suitable for the Chonradh na Gaeilge celebration in 1943. *The Connacht Tribune* mentioned it as '... a short drama...' with a good performance given by the playwright (23 October, page 3). Ultan Macken claims that the play was written to 'celebrate' his birth on 18 September 1943 (Macken, 2009, 149).

## **6. Oighreacht na Mara**

The play was published in Galway by D. W. Kenny, The Bookshop, Galway. There is no indication of a publication date but it is likely to have been sometime after the mid-1940s. The Wuppertal archive has a manuscript copy of the play, (BUW manuscript Nr. 74).

The play has a cast of three women and six men. It was first performed at the

**Footnote 6.3:** My translation to English of *Bhí Mac Agam Tráth* was done by Caoimhín Ó hÍcí, Oifigigeach na Gaeilge, St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra, Dublin 9.

Taibhdhearc on 22 - 25 June 1944 and for single performances on 8 July and 6 August that year. It was revived by the Taibhdhearc in May 1945 prior to its Abbey Theatre performances. Macken directed both productions and also played the part of Seán Breathnach.

An account of the performances at the Abbey Theatre on 27 and 28 May 1945 is given in Chapter 2 (Page 62). The play was later performed at the Taibhdhearc in February 1963.

The play is described as a drama but clearly moves into melodrama due to the somewhat sensational and unexpected behaviours. The play is set in Claddagh, a small fishing village west of Galway city. Seán, son of Mairtín a Claddagh fisherman, has turned his back on fishing in favour of a more settled job as manager of a shop in Galway. It is a tale of emotional swings that add to the melodrama. An English trawler has just arrived in the bay. It has been fishing within the fishing limits and the local fishermen decide to attack the boat. The local detective warns against this because, being wartime, the trawler is armed but the boats set sail with tragic consequences.

**Picture 6.10** is a promotional still from the 1944 performance <sup>157</sup>. It includes Sean MacClory who went on to a successful Hollywood career in films (**Footnote 6.4**).



M Ó Beirn, [not identified], S MacClory and Seán Ó hÓráin, donated by Micheál Ó Beirn.



*Oighreacht na Mara* mirrors in part Macken's famous novel, *Rain on the Wind*, published in 1950. Both are based in the Claddagh fishing community and while the family at the centre of the play have a son and daughter, in the book there are two sons. A similar incident with an English trawler found poaching close to the shore and inside the fishing limits forms a good part of the play and is a lesser though still significant event in the book.

The 'Synopsis' of the play, from the Taibhdhearc programme, **Appendix 6.3** gives a description of the action of the play.<sup>158</sup>

**7. (a) *An Fear ón Spidéal*, (b) *Ring for Langford-Jones*, (c) *Rude Forefathers*, (d) *Pairt Thaidg*, (e) *The Man from Spiddal***

*An Fear ón Spidéal* was published in Dublin by Oifig an tSoláthair in 1952<sup>159</sup>. The play was first produced at Taibhdhearc na Gaillimhe in July 1945. It was not revived until well after Macken had left the Taibhdhearc. Traolach Ó hAonghusa directed the revival in October 1960 and also in December 1966. In the first production Walter Macken played the part of Persí Ó Conchubhair described as the shy and bashful boy-friend of the daughter of the house, Máire/ Lindy. The play has a cast of five women and seven men. It is a comedy.

**Footnote 6.4:** Sean McClory's career as an actor spanned more than six decades. He played at Taibhdhearc na Gaillimhe and the Abbey Theatre. He was in Macken's *Oighreacht na Mara* at the Taibhdhearc and was a cast member for the visit to the Abbey Theatre 27, 28 May 1945, **Picture 2.25**. Declining to continue his medical studies, Sean Mac Labhraid was accepted into the Abbey Theatre on a Comhar scholarship and was immediately given a replacement part in *Nuair a Bhíonn Fear Marbh*. This was followed by a part in *The Plough and the Stars*. (NFC 98, Volume 10, 27/09/45). His career in film included well over 100 films and television series. He was born on 8 March 1924 in Dublin and died on 10 December 2003 in Hollywood Hills, California, USA. His stage debut in the USA was as Mickey Linden in *The Shining Hour*, La Jolla Playhouse, CA, in 1947 and his Broadway debut was as Rory Commons in *The King of Friday's Men* with Walter Macken at Playhouse Theatre in 1951. He played in three of the four performances. In 1987, he played Mr. Grace in the film *The Dead* directed by John Huston (1987). (This note taken in part from: <http://www.filmreference.com/film/70/Sean-McClory.html>)

Like *An Cailín Aimsire Abú*, the final Irish version of *An Fear ón Spidéal* is itself a translation from two earlier works written in English. The first of these, *Ring for Langford-Jones*, exists as a hand written manuscript (BUW Manuscript Nr. 110). Its condition indicates that it pre-dates a typed manuscript that was renamed *Rude Forefathers* (BUW Manuscript Nr. 111).

*Rude Forefathers* was submitted to the Abbey Theatre sometime during 1941 under Macken's nom de-plume, Nicholas Retlaw, (**Footnote 6.5**). The play was rejected by the reading committee (NFC 98, Volume 9, 5 February 1942).

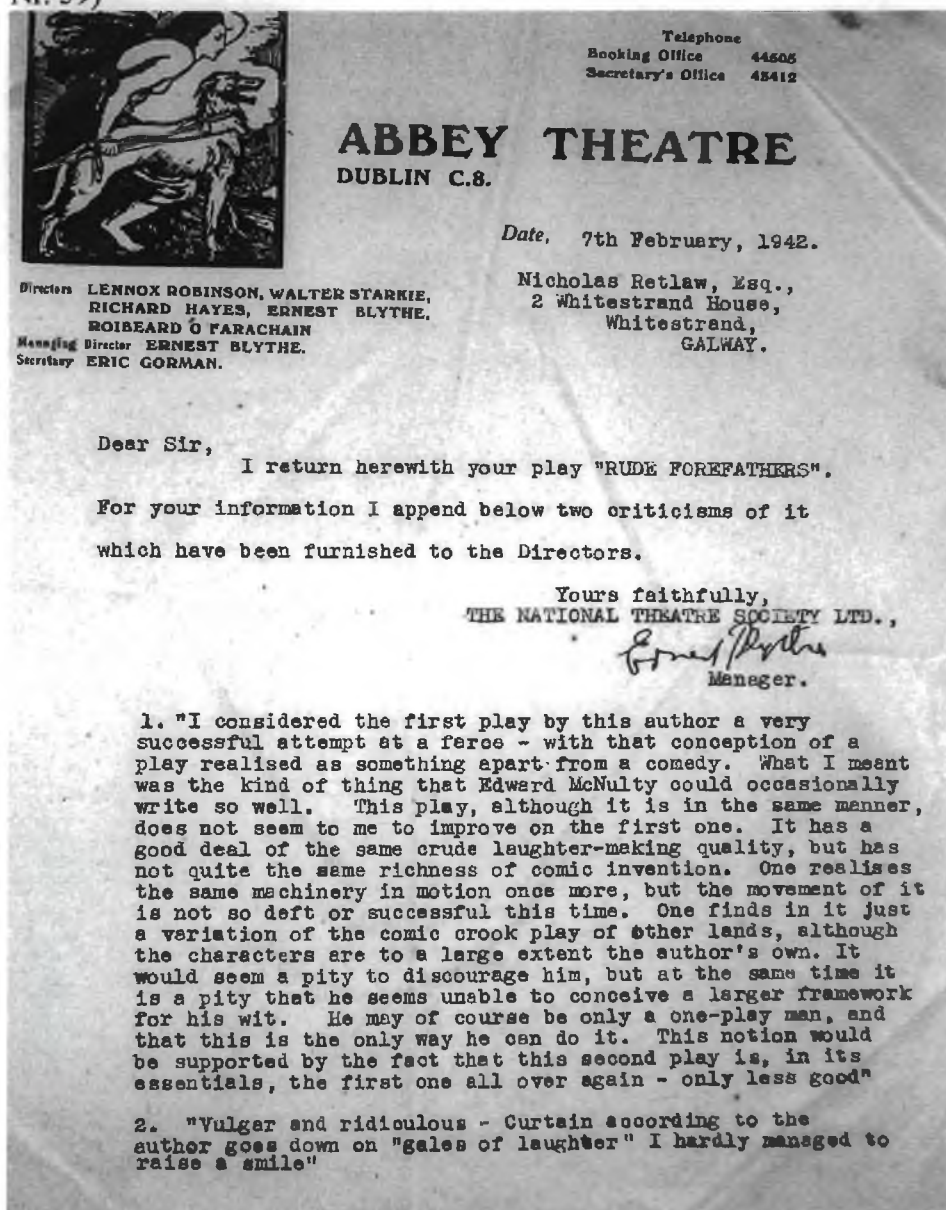
Ernest Blythe wrote to Nicholas Retlaw on 7 February and his letter included the 'readers' criticism of the play. This criticism does provide some insight into the type of feedback aspiring playwrights received from the Abbey. The letter also mentions an earlier farce submitted by Retlaw, **Picture 6.11**. This farce was likely to have been *Lucy Callaghan's Father*. There is no record of any other Retlaw or Macken play in the Abbey Readers Reports or in the Abbey Board minutes from before the establishment of the 'readers committee' at the end of 1939.

A possible explanation is that the farce, *Lucy Callaghan's Father*, was submitted for the Abbey play competition in 1939. The competition was supervised by Brinsley MacNamara. There were 78 entries and no complete list of the plays entered appears to exist. The outcome of the competition was recorded in the Abbey Board minutes on the 5 January 1940 and the successful plays were named in the minutes (see also **Footnote 2.9**).

The first Macken play submitted to the Abbey was the one act play, *Flat to Let*, discussed earlier in this chapter.

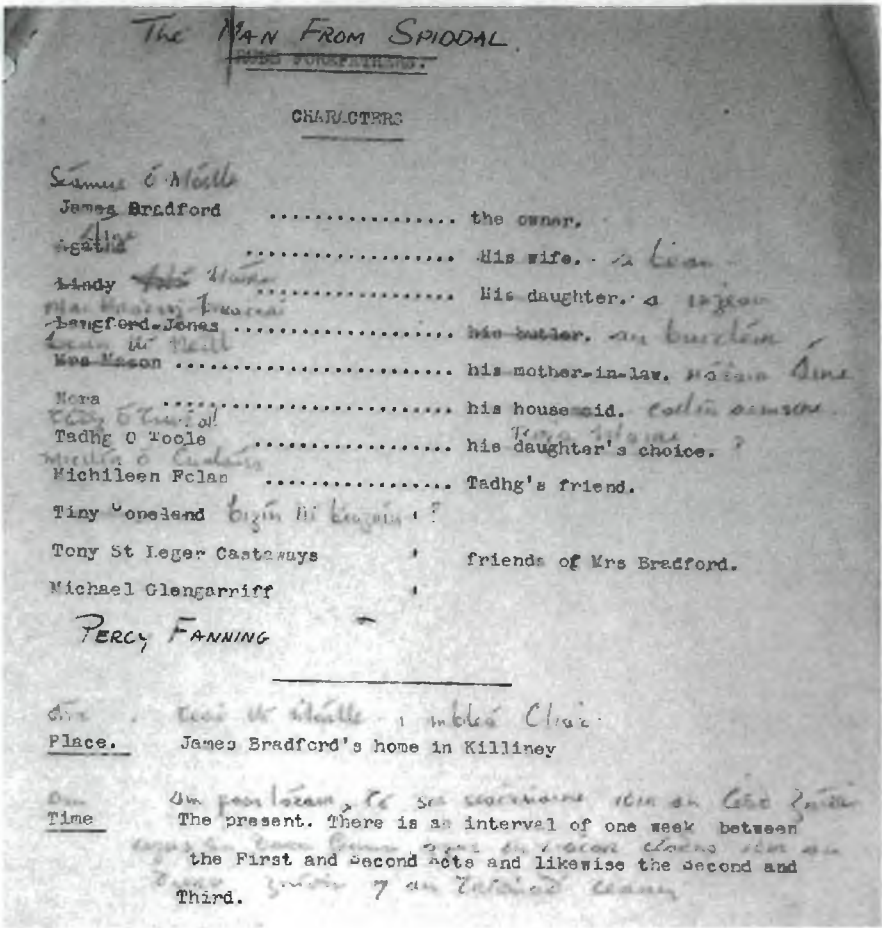
**Footnote 6.5:** Walter Macken's nom-de-plume, Nicholas Retlaw, appears to have been only associated with his plays, *Lucy Callaghan's Father*, *Ring for Langford-Jones*, and *Rude Forefathers*. The Retlaw is Walter spelt backwards and the Nicholas is likely taken from St. Nicholas of Myra a saint associated with seaports and the Collegiate Church of St. Nicholas in Galway. This church is a well known Galway landmark with a dominant clock-tower. The Church is only a short distance through Buttermilk Lane from Taibhdhearc na Gaillimhe.

Picture 6.11: Blythe's letter rejecting *Rude Forefathers* (BUW Manuscript Folder Nr. 59)



The other version of *An Fear ón Spidéal* is an apparent updating of *Rude Forefathers* and called *The Man from Spiddal* (BUW Manuscript Nr. 59) but whether the Irish version of the play was a translation from one or the other English language versions is not known.

**Picture 6.12:** Illustrates the change of title while the changes to the cast names could indicate that both the final Irish and English versions of the play were being written more or less at the same times. (BUW Manuscript Nr. 59)



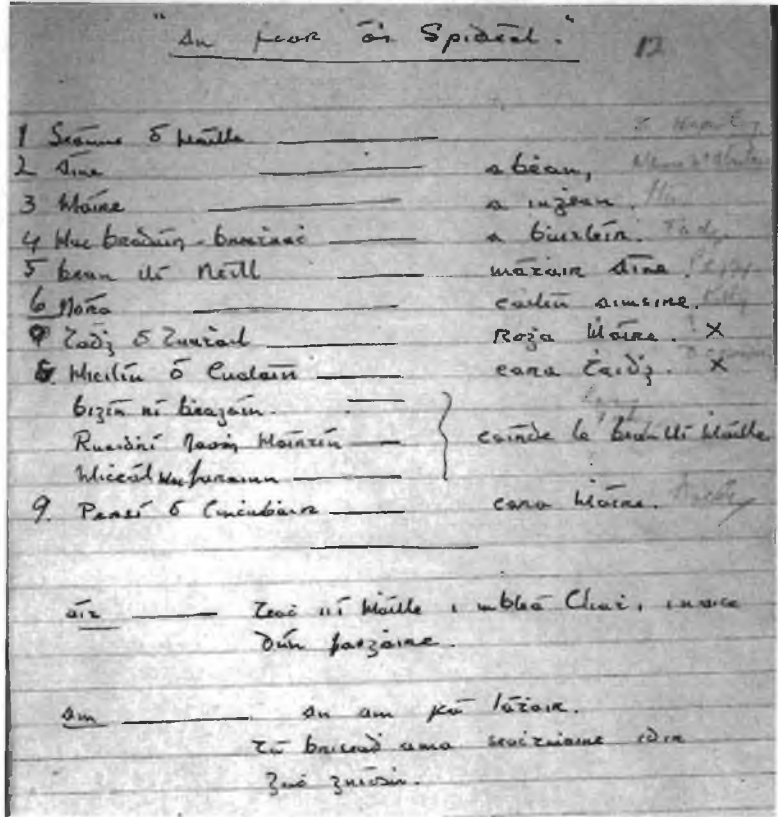
*An Fear ón Spidéal* is the only one of these five titles to be performed.

**Picture 6.13:** Set for the original 1945 production of *An Fear ón Spidéal* <sup>160</sup>



There is a handwritten copy of Act 1 and Act 3 of *An Fear ón Spidéal* in the Wuppertal archive (BUW Manuscript Nr. 76) and it lists, down the right hand side, the actors cast for each part. (Footnote 6.6)

Picture 6.14



The play is centred round the family of Séamus Ó Mháille. He is a butcher from Cork and now extremely wealthy, having invented a revolutionary sausage-making machine. The family consists of Séamus, his wife Áine, their daughter Máire and Áine's mother, Bean Uí Néill. Séamus is a collector of expensive gold items.

Máire has returned from Spiddal and has announced her engagement to a man from Spiddal, Tadhg. Tadhg's interest is elsewhere. The Ó Mháilles are lavish entertainers and include 'bohemian' friends among their guests.

**Footnote 6.6:** Séamus was played by T. Healy, Áine by Maire McAlister, Máire by Ita (O'Mahony), the Butler by Tadhg (Ó Súilleabháin), Bean Uí Néill by Peggy (Macken), etc. This was the original cast. A copy of the original Taibhdhearc programme is in the Taibhdhearc archive in NUIG.<sup>161</sup>



The family employs a butler and a maid, Nora. Máire has brought Tadhg and his friend from Spiddal to Dublin to meet her parents. She intends that the wedding will take place in a fortnight.

This is a complicated piece of writing. **Appendix 6.4** contains the ‘synopsis’ now titled ‘Dóibh Suíd ar Bheagán Gaeilge’ and is from the Taibhdhearc 1960 production.<sup>162</sup>

The action takes place over a period of two weeks. There is a single set (**Picture 6.13**). Act one reads well. We meet all the main characters and the plot unfolds. Act two slows with the introduction of the three artists and though this is the shortest of the three acts (28 pages), I was left wondering if their contribution was necessary. The act reinforces the uncertainty from Act one and indicates the resolution. Act three resolves the cross romance and máthair Áine solves the robbery – the butler did it (Langford-Jones from the first version of this play)! The necessity for the inclusion of this in-house robbery must also be questioned.

There are some minor differences between the Irish and the English versions, as would be expected in a re-draft and translation.

The play has obvious similarities with *An Cailín Aimsire Abú* and this would support the comments made by the first reader quoted in Blythe’s letter (**Picture 6.11**). *The Man from Spiddal* is not nearly as good a play as *An Cailín Aimsire Abú*.

Finally, there is yet another version of this play. Entitled *Pairt Thaidg* (BUW Manuscript 73b), it is also a three-Act play written in Irish. Inspection of the manuscript shows the play to be almost identical to *The Man from Spiddal*. Page 1 is missing from Act one and page 6 is missing from Act three. One Act is handwritten. The manuscript is in very poor condition. This version of the play was likely written in towards the mid-1940s’. The name of Ita O’Mahony is written on the top of Act three and that would place the writing between 1944 and 1947. There is no mention of this title in the Taibhdhearc anniversary booklet, *Na Drámaí a Léiríodh I dTaibhdhearc na Gaillimhe, 1928-2003*.

Summarising this collection of plays, I have found that there are five versions of the play that was eventually published as *An Fear ón Spidéal* in 1952. All have named Tadhg (O'Toole) as *The Man from Spiddal*. They begin with *Ring for Langford-Jones*, then *Rude Forefathers*, *Pairt Thaidg*, *An Fear ón Spidéal* and finally *The Man from Spiddal*.

#### **8. (a) *Mungo's Mansion* (b) *Mungo and the Mowleogs***

*Mungo's Mansion* was published by Macmillan and Co. Ltd., in 1946.<sup>163</sup> It has always enjoyed a good measure of success. It was first played at the Abbey Theatre in February 1946 (**Picture 2.31**) with, a cast that included F. J. McCormick and Siobhan McKenna. The play was revived by the Abbey in April 1948 with Macken in the title role (**Picture 3.1**).

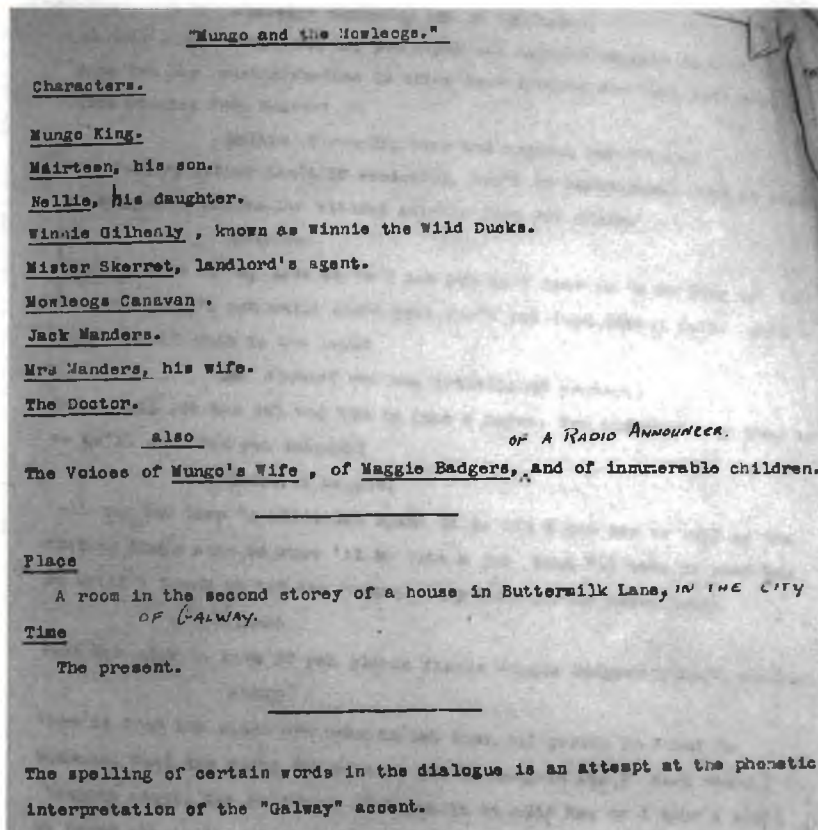
Like most of Macken's plays it would have gone through various drafts and the play originally had the title, *Mungo and the Mowleogs*.

The Wuppertal manuscript (BUW folders 54 & 55) is an almost final script and provides examples of some of the corrections Macken made before finally releasing the play. One example is the replacement of the word 'hope' by 'trust,' the final part of the sentence reading '... when I trust that my endeavours will not be in vain.' (Macken, 1946, 27)

As already mentioned, *Mungo and the Mowleogs* originally had a 'miracle' ending (see Chapter 2, page 74 and Abbey Theatre minutes for 8 November 1945). I thought it would be interesting to see this ending. It appears however to have been removed during the re-write. There are a few lines existing that indicate where the revision started, see **Appendix 6.5**.

The cast for both plays, *Mungo's Mansion* and *Mungo and the Mowleogs*, are the same, see **Picture 6.15**.

Picture 6.15



It is the story of Mungo King (Footnote 6.7) and his family living in a Galway city slum. Mungo, a dock worker, now '...crippled in his chair...' (1946, 3), is recovering after an accident at work. He is confined to an upstairs room in the tenement house where he lives in Buttermilk Lane, '...in the second top a Mungo's Mansion' (1946, 4).

Buttermilk Lane is in the centre of Galway City, just off Shop Street, the main street in Galway, **Picture 6.16**. The tenement building has three floors (1946, 49). We hear that there are eleven children in the family and the eldest two, Mairteen and Nellie are both working and support the family. (Footnote 6.8, next page)

**Footnote 6.7:** The name Mungo would not appear to have been common-place in Galway. Macken may have used the name knowing that Mungo is a description (1) for a cloth made from rags of heavily felted woollen cloth that indicate shoddy and inferior material or (2) that it was a title used by St. Kentigen, 518-603, who became Bishop of Cumbria and was called Mungo from the Gaelic: Chief Lord or dear one. The idea of Mungo King as 'a shoddy, inferior chief or dear one' is attractive. More simply, Mungo is the name of one of the boys in Macken's autobiography, *Cockle and Mustard* (Macken, 2009, 53).



**Picture 6.16:** View of Buttermilk Lane from Shop Street, Galway, towards Middle Street. (June 2009)



The story revolves around Mungo and his stubborn refusal to move to a new housing development in Shantalla where the better living conditions would improve the survival chances of his youngest son. Mungo is a tyrant and a bully and the play itself swings from comedy through melodrama to tragedy. The tragedy is provided by the murder of the wife of the upstairs lodger by her husband.

**Footnote 6.8:** Macken's plays about slum conditions in Galway appear to have caused some local reaction. This would likely have come from the City 'fathers' the local landlords, business people and Galway Corporation. Macken's next play, *Vacant Possession*, when published in 1948 contained a defensive 'Authors Note' that stated:

Lest readers of this play and *Mungo's Mansion* should visualise the city of Galway as a town of tenements and condemned houses, I hasten to make clear that Galway Corporation is one of the most efficient bodies in the land, that they have eradicated slums and have almost abolished tenements, and that it would be virtually impossible to find the "Gantry" in the up-to-date city today....

This statement is a diplomatic attempt to placate local complainants. Hopefully it had the desired affect. The fact is the slums in Galway continued to exist well beyond the 1940s'. Macken does moderate this comment by dedicating *Vacant Possession* '...to the poorer people of Galway...'

*Mungo's Mansion* should give audiences a view of slum life in Galway. Unfortunately, the original Abbey production failed to represent this aspect of Galway life. This did not go unnoticed by the reviewers, see Chapter 2, page.73.

The play is written in classical style. All the action takes place in the same day and at the same location. Convention at the time required that the play be presented in three Acts. The action is continuous and to present the play in two Acts would offer no difficulties. A number of the scenes could be omitted, for example: the one with the noisy but unseen children on page 33 and the conversation between Winnie and the unseen Maggie Badgers on page 56. With some additional editing the play would still provide a good evening's entertainment. The ending in particular should be shortened.

Hogan (1968, 67) give a good description of the play and concludes:

The play has half a dozen good roles and several moments of real comedy and suspense – particularly in the broadcast of the horse race and in Mungo's being trapped alone by the murderer. The worst fault is the length. Macken develops many scenes beyond what was needed and makes some points twice over. Despite that it is an amusing, tensely gripping play. Although Macken substitutes broad melodrama for tragedy and includes a happy ending, he was doing for Galway's Claddagh what O'Casey had done for Dublin's Mountjoy Square. (Footnote 6.9)

**Appendix 6.6** lists the Abbey's original cast and **Appendix 6.7** is a copy of Macken's handwritten dedication and cast list used for the gallery proof (BUW folder 55).

**Footnote 6.9:** Here Hogan errs in detail. The Claddagh district which features in many of the Macken novels was not the focus of his plays. The one exception is his Irish language play, *Oighreacht na Mara*. The Claddagh is on the west bank of the river Corrib and was originally outside the Galway City walls. Buttermilk Lane is City Centre, **Picture 6.16**.

## 9. *The Boys Come Home*

This is a full-length play written in three acts. The action is continuous. It has a cast of eight men and eight women, see **Appendix 6.8**. The play was thought to have been written about 1940. This is the date indicated in the Wuppertal summary list, **Appendix 01**, but from its style it would appear to have been written later in the 1940s. Also, the play was submitted to the Abbey Theatre and rejected, the decision reported to the Abbey Board on the 30 September 1948 (see also page 99).

There are two copies of the script in the Wuppertal library, BUW Manuscripts Nr. 43 and 97, one copy with corrections.

The play is set in the Owen Hotel in Connemara. It is a hotel that offers guests the opportunity to fish the local river and lake particularly for salmon. The owners, John and Maggie Owen, have just cancelled all bookings as two of their sons are returning home to be married. Maggie is unwell and confined to bed in her upstairs room. The play opens with John Owen, known as Johnno, Maggie's husband dealing with a protesting customers on the phone. The customer is still hoping to book a room and is being refused by Johnno.

Festy, one of the employees of the hotel, a handyman and fishing expert is installing a loudspeaker in the hotel foyer so that Maggie can command from her bed and also so that she can welcome the family visitors without leaving her bed. Festly shows little respect for Johnno as do the rest of the hotel staff. It is Maggie that runs the establishment and she has great regard for Festy for his handyman skills; he is the only one who can '...catch salmon and row boats and milk cows and look after a donkey engine and fix electrical lights' (Act 1, page 7). Festy has recently returned from England and during his time there was introduced to Communism which he now preached to the villagers. He has already fallen foul of the local Parish Priest for this preaching. 'I merely... told them that they were oney a bunch of slaves, crawlin' on their bellies t' Church and State when the country belongs to them be rights....' (Act 1, page 8)

John and Maggie Owen have three sons, a doctor, an engineer and a priest. Oscar, the doctor, works in England is coming home with his English wife to be, Judy. Her parents, Major and Mrs. Durham have independent means and Major Durham wants to spend as much time as possible fishing. Declan, the engineer, is bringing home Claire, the daughter of a cattle farmer from the Irish Midlands. Both sets of parents are due to arrive on the bus. The priest, Eoin, is to officiate at the wedding.

The play opens well and though somewhat repetitious maintained one's interest. It was with the arrival of the first couple (Oscar and Judy) that the play starts to lose its way. They arrive at the end of Act one and '... they look anything but lovers.' They are in the middle of a blazing row that carries them into the hotel foyer and into full view and hearing of those gathered to greet them.

JUDY. ...I leave my home and my country for a man like you. Because I thought you were at least a gentleman.

OSCAR. I made the same mistake, so I did. For a wild moment in England I thought you were a lady.

**JUDY.** How dare you, how dare you!

OSCAR. How dare yourself, you, you empty-headed scatterbrain!

**JUDY.** You uncouth lout! You deplorable bog-trotter!

This exchange continues to the end of the act. From the moment of the couple's appearance we hear Maggie's welcome greetings to them delivered over the loudspeaker:

Welcome, welcome children to the house of peace that will be the bower of your lasting love.... Welcome you my dear Oscar to your home among the Connemara hills.... Welcome to you and to your bride Judy to the bosom of a new family that will love you as they do their very own.... This house is open to you and yours my dear Judy. We know you will find peace here. Let it be a love nest for both of you....

(Act 1, page 38)

The row continues into Act two and draws in Judy's parents and Oscar's father, Johnno, until the booming voice of Maggie intervenes '...a sick woman, palpitatin' to greet the pair of ye...' (Act 2, page 3). Left alone the two fathers exchange confidences about their respective children. The Major describing the couple as 'like tinder and flint' and Johnno see Oscar as ...'thinking that he was doing God Almighty a favour be coming into the world at all' (Act 2, page 5). The parents of the second couple arrive having made the local pub their first port of call. Mr. Connolly, the Midlands farmer, is unimpressed with the locals in the pub, '...as soon as you ask them anything they start talking Irish...' He is also unimpressed with most other things, though he is impressed with Breedeen, the hotel help, '...a fine well set-up girl' (Act 2, page 3). The Major has had enough of all this business and leaves to fish.

The subsidiary story, a rivalry between Festy and Pakey, the two hotel workers, for the attention of Breedeen, almost comes to blows and is prevented by the return of Oscar and Judy from their visit to Maggie upstairs. Their differences remain unresolved.

Declan and Claire arrive (Act 2, page 27) and we are treated to a repeat performance of insults. A row has developed between them and, as before, spills over into the Hotel foyer to be witnessed by the company. The brothers, Oscar and Declan, rush to the defence of the other's girlfriend and end up fighting and rolling on the floor, to be joined by the two employees, Festy and Pakey exchanging blows over their interest in Breedeen. The Act ends with Maggie over the loudspeaker asking 'Listen, for God's sake will someone tell me what's going on down there' (Act 2, page 34).

It is into this scene of Oscar fighting Declan and Pakey fighting Festy, witnessed by Connolly, his wife Agnes, Mrs Durham, Breedeen and Johnno, that Eoin, the priest, arrives. His arrival calms the situation and with the home-spun advice of Connolly, a resolution to the pre-marriage differences of the sons is suggested.

Wouldn't a blind eejit see that that's the answer. Oscar and Judy are at each others throats; Claire and Declan are at one another's throats; Oscar likes Claire and gets

on very well with her; Declan likes Judy and gets on very well with her. Right. Switch. And there you have it, as simple as two and two makes four.

(Connolly, Act 3, page 20)

Eoin agrees 'There's something in what he says, you know.' He goes on to recommend that the new couples should think it over.

If I were you I would go into the air and I would walk a little and talk a little and may god forgive me, I would even court a little with one another, not your selected partners but the others, and pretend that you are going to switch, and imagine what it would be like to spend the rest of your days with somebody who thinks almost exactly the same as you do.

(Act 3, page 22)

Eoin then turns his attention to Festy and his communism. Festy dismisses the priest's argument about the modest improvements in the living standards of the people in Connemara 'Because it [the little extra money] kem from fellas like me and thousands of us, that had to go to England and other places in order to send the money to keep the others alive' (Act 3, page 25).

Eoin slides away from this argument, 'Look Festy, I'm not going to talk to you about all those things now. We can talk about them again...' and turns to personal matters. He quizzes Festy about his intentions for Breedeen. When Festy hesitates on Eoin's offer to marry them Eoin produces Festy wife, abandoned by him when he left England. That clears the way for Pakey and Breedeen.

The couples return having decided to remain together. Declan declares that 'we all just had a little disagreement that's all' (Act 3, page 34).

Mrs Durham reminds the party 'You see why people who are to be married are not supposed to be with one another twenty four hours before. It's a tradition born of experience' (Act 3, page 37).

The last pages of the play are taken up with Eoin organising a photograph of all present. Festy and his wife (Jeannie) are reconciled, Maggie is carried from her bed for the photograph and the curtain falls on a babble of niggling conversation (Act 3, page 43).

*The Boys Come Home* is described as a comedy. The opening Act holds the attention and the characters are likeable. Most are larger than life, in particular Festy and Johnno and these are balanced by The Durhams, Pakey and Breedeen. Sarah, the other kitchen help, is described as simple and her role is to provide a decoy love interest for Pakey.

Otherwise she spent her time announcing that 'the potatoes is bilin' or 'the kittle is bilin'.' I was briefly reminded of *Fawlty Towers* (the classic British comedy) and in this case the woman owner, Maggie, confined to bed, attempts to maintain control over those down stairs by loudspeaker. Whatever comedy there is in the opening scene disappears with the arrival the sons and their fiancées. Generally their behaviour is crass. The challenge of Festy's communist beliefs by Eoin, the priest, is ducked and we were left with Festy neutralised by the arrival of his deserted wife.

The play compares poorly with Macken's 1943 comedy/ farce, *Salute the Servant* and I would also rate it below his over-elaborate comedy *The Man from Spiddal*.

**10. (a) *Vacant Possession*, (b) *Three Days in the Gantry* (c) *Gaels in the Gantry*.**

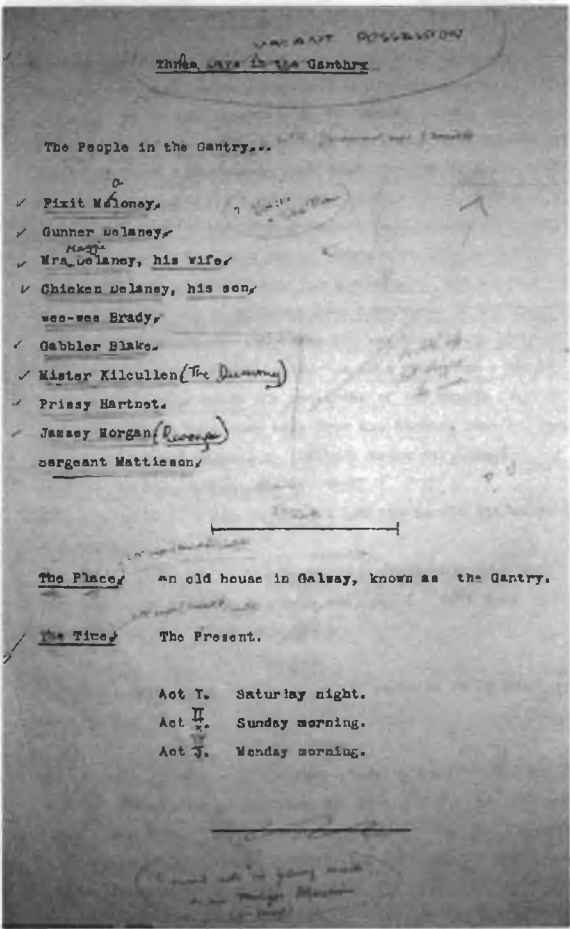
*Vacant Possession* was published by Macmillan and Co in 1948.<sup>164</sup>

There are two other versions of this play in the Wuppertal archive. These are: *Three Days in the Gantry* (BUW Manuscript Nr.68) and this would appear to be the earlier. The other, *Gaels in the Gantry*, is a typed manuscript also in three Acts (BUW Manuscript Nr. 100). The three titles are the same play effectively finished and in different editorial stages. The copy named *Three Days in the Gantry* appears to have been updated and renamed *Gaels in the Gantry*, **Picture 6.17**.

Picture 6.17



The title and cast page from *Three Days in the Gentry* shows the characters, referred to as 'The People in the Gentry', to be the same as those in the published version of *Vacant Possession* (1948, vi) **Picture 6.18**





BUW Manuscript folder 107 and 81 contain copies of *Vacant Possession*.

In editing the early versions to the final version Macken did make some other changes. For example, he changed the name of the pub mentioned throughout the play from Martin's to Minchin's [Martin's was likely an identifiable Galway pub] and on page 18 (page 22 in the published script) he decided to have Mrs. Delaney referred to as Maggie and for the remainder of the play.

Macken also wrote different endings and tried different songs for the final scene.

**Appendix 6.9** shows these endings.

*Vacant Possession* has never received a professional production and for such a gripping and entertaining piece of work, this has to be surprising. Set in a derelict house in Galway, the 'Gantry' becomes a refuge for the Delaney family for a weekend. The house is about to be demolished and the action of the play centre on the efforts by Mr. Kilcullen (The Dummy) to forcibly remove the 'squatters'.

THE DUMMY:       ... I'm warnin' yeh now. I'm goin' to be down here with  
                          the gang on Monday mornin' to demolition the Ganthry. You can  
                          go or yeh can stay, but begob, if ye stay I'll pull the roof in on the  
                          top of yeer heads.... (Page 39)

In this play there are certainly clear parallels with O'Casey's *Juno and the Paycock*. These are more in the characters and the dialogue, a point that Hogan makes (1968, 67). But we also have the poverty and the effect of drink on the family.

Gunner Delaney has drunk the rent money (not for the first time). The family, consisting of Gunner, his wife Maggie and their son 'Chicken' have been evicted from their flat for not paying the rent and are now destitute. Encouraged and assisted by Gunner's friend, Fixit Maloney, they move temporarily into the Gantry.

Gunner is a carter, now crippled. He has lost a leg as the result of an accident loading coal. When he was discharged from hospital after the accident he started drinking, as Mrs Delaney (Maggie) says: 'It was losin' the leg that done it..... Straight for it he wint, like an oul' tom-cat after cream...' (Page 18)

When moving their few belongings into The Gantry, Chicken and Mrs Delaney met a local small-time crook, Wee-wee Brady. In Galway, as with all provincial towns, what the people do and how they conduct their business is fairly common knowledge and Maggie (Mrs. Delaney) has no illusions about the prospects for Wee-wee Brady: 'They's a rope waitin' for that fella somewhere, and mark my words he'll dangle from the end oo't before he's much older.' (Page 27)

Brady, knowing that the Delaney family had been evicted, calls later to the Gantry ostensibly to find a retreat for the night for an older, more educated crook, Gabbler Blake, who '...stole outa Loughrea [The Galway County Home formerly the Workhouse] about a week ago an' he's been walking to Galway ever since" (Page 31). The Gabbler is now on the run. I believe this sub-plot gives some light relief from the crushing poverty of the main characters and the attempts by the Dummy and others to evict them from the Gantry. Hogan finds this part of the play somewhat distracting from the main story (1968, 67).

The desperation of the Delaney family is compounded by Maggie's refusal to give Gunner money for drink. This results in a row between the two. Gunner strikes Maggie and she leaves him. She has taken enough abuse from her husband:

I've stood by yeh through thick an' thin ... but this is the ind. I'm goin' into the room now, Gunner, an' I'm goin' the get me shawl an' I'm lavin' yeh, and ye'll never see Maggie agin. Good bye now, Gunner, and from here on forever yeh can stew in yer own porter juice.' (Page 70)

Remorse and drink leads to Gunner's death that may have been an accident or suicide. But arising from this tragedy there is the possibility of survival for Maggie and Chicken, as Chicken explains to Fixit:

.... It's the best thing that happened me mother that he went out like that now. Don't yeh see yerself, Fixit, the difference it'll make? (*Turning to Fixit*) I'll have the oul' horse an' cart now. The Gunner could make over four quid a week with the oul' cartin racket, an' me Ma was lucky if she ever saw tin bob a week out oo't. Now I'll have it, an' she'll be well off again for the first time in her life. We'll eat agin regular, Fixit, an we'll be able teh wear a dacent suit a clothes, ...

(Page 87)

This is an entertaining play. The main characters are credible and the action moves at a pace that maintains interest. There is a reality to the work and the distraction of the robbery does not take from the main tragedy of a life destroyed by the working conditions and circumstances of the time. Gunner turned to drunkenness to ease the pain and misery without thought or regard for his wife and son. The play also presents the irony of the emergence of hope from the death of the father.

Hogan concludes his summary:

In this least known of Macken's plays, the dialogue is again racier and the characterisation larger than life, but that hardly seems a great fault when what emerges is so entertaining. (1968, 68)

The play did receive one relatively recent performance in July 1993 as part of the Galway Arts Festival. It was performed at the NUIG Aula Maxima and the production was by Sighle Meehan. *The City Tribune* described it as 'A Play for True Galwegians',

**Appendix 6.10.**

[Author's note: Maggie Delaney in *Vacant Possession* might perhaps be compared with Anna Fierling in Brecht's *Mother Courage* (1941) <sup>165</sup>, although it is not certain that Macken knew Brecht's work. To be noted is the 'carting' connection between the women and their dogged persistence and courage, (Brecht, 111). The scale of the settings could not be more different however, on one hand a European War, and on the other the squalid misery of the Galway tenements.

...Let all of you who still survive  
Get out of bed and look alive. (Brecht, 111)]

### 11. *The Whistling Woman,*

This is a one Act play of 26 typed foolscap pages, with a cast of five men and three women (BUW Manuscript Folder Nr. 72). It is a fascinating read. It is layered and very entertaining. It shows a style that I have not found in his other plays and the characters while coexisting in the same time live in very different worlds.

The play is set in an artist's studio being prepared for a celebration by two local women. The local women 'frame' the action and their attitudes contrast with the studio's owner and the party guests. The regular cleaning woman, Mrs Breen, when attending to her cleaning duties is usually accompanied by her husband, Torquemada (known as Torc). Unfortunately, Torc is indisposed and her unmarried friend, Mrs. Nelson, is her 'obligee' for this occasion. Mrs. B would not feel safe alone in 'an artist's studio'. Both women are described as unattractive and 'looking' over fifty.

Mrs. B.                      He [the artist] may be the best man in the world. I said to Torc. He may be a holy saint , I said, but you never know with them artists.

Mrs Nelson.      OO, how right you are dear. You cannot trust a painter. We had one at home one time, doin' up the attic. OO, he could roll his eyes, he could. (Page 3)

Mrs. Breen knows her way around the flat and when showing Mrs Nelson around asks her to look at a particular canvas which she takes from a stack of canvases resting against the wall.

Mrs. Nelson.           Ooooooo! Dear!

Mrs. B.                Now! See! What did I tell you. In the all-in. Not a stitch on her.  
Now isn't it as well to be careful.

Mrs. Nelson.   You mean he did that from a real girl.

Mrs B.             Flesh and blood, moles and all.

Mrs. Nelson.   Oo, the hussy

Mrs B.            Bold as brass, if you don't mind. It was daytime too. I came in to do a little tidying up. And there she was, on that sofia there, laughing. Brought me out in goos pimples [sic], it did. I told Torc, too. You know what he said?

Mrs. Nelson.   What did he say.

Mrs. B.           And I'm not even outa me winter underwear, he said. Imagine,

Mrs. Nelson.   Very apt, ma'm.

Mrs. B.           They don't understand. And she's a good Catholic girl too. Would you believe it?

(Pages 3)

Mrs B explains to Mrs Nelson that Torc 'was a great comfort...' to her when she was working in the studio.

Mrs B.               ... but he liked sitting on the fridge. Nothing could get him off it. Whistling too.

Mrs. Nelson.   He was always a good whistler. Like a thrush.

Mrs. B.           No dear, not Torc, the wan in the picture. She had red hair. Looking at me under her eyelashes she was and whistling kind of soft.

(Page 4)



coincidence, parallels an event from the artist's own life with his 'whistling' model, the subject in the nude painting.

Mrs. Breen interrupts the conversation between the artist and his guests announcing that 'the baked meats are prepared' and the guests should move to the other room.

Mrs. B.                      Mr. Savage, the time is runnin' out. We'll be a disgrace on the streets if its much later. Will I bile the kettle?  
Savage.                    Yes, in the name of God, boild the bloody kettle [sic].  
Mrs. B.                    I'd be obliged if you wouldn't use bad language. Mr. Savage. For mesel I don't mind, but Mrs. Nelson is a Protestant and she's sensitive, to such, begging your pardon, but such things must be said. (Page 25)

Savage and his guests retire to the other room and the play ends with Mrs. B and Mrs. Nelson having a drink.

Mrs. Nelson.              All the talk. And the little fella, what's he done?  
Mrs. B.                    That fella wrote a play or something seem like.  
Mrs. Nelson.              What! A little wishy, washey fella like that. Who'd ever think he had it in him.  
Mrs. B.                    Here's your good health ma'am, and may we see our sacred beds before the small hours of the morning.  
Mrs. Nelson.              Health to you dear, and patience to poor Torquemada. (Page 26)

I have one reservation relating to one character in the play. I thought the introduction of the messenger boy sent by the paper's editor to collect the critic's copy for the morning edition of the newspaper unnecessary. Nevertheless, in the hands of a competent director I am satisfied that this problem could be resolved satisfactorily.

## 12. *Types and Shadows*

This play was written around 1948. The copy in the Wuppertal archive is undated but the address Macken used on the script cover sheet is 'c/o The Abbey Theatre, Dublin'. There is no record that he submitted the play to the Abbey but he sent a copy to H. M. Tennent Ltd in London. John Perry from Tennent wrote to Macken at the Abbey address on the 29 September 1949 returning the script and while quite liking the play described it a 'terribly over-written.' He also wondered 'How you are going to end the play, I really can't imagine.' This could indicate that Macken submitted an incomplete script, see **Appendix 6.11** for the Tennent letter.

*Types and Shadows* is a play in three Acts (BUW Manuscript Nr. 106). I found it to be an easy and engaging read and though I agree with the Perry comment about being over written, the writing is excellent, the story line engaging and the characters believable.

The story embraces the early years of the 20th Century in Ireland and the relationship between the landowner and the inhabitants of the local village and its deterioration from a form of benevolent feudalism to rebellion and wanton destruction.

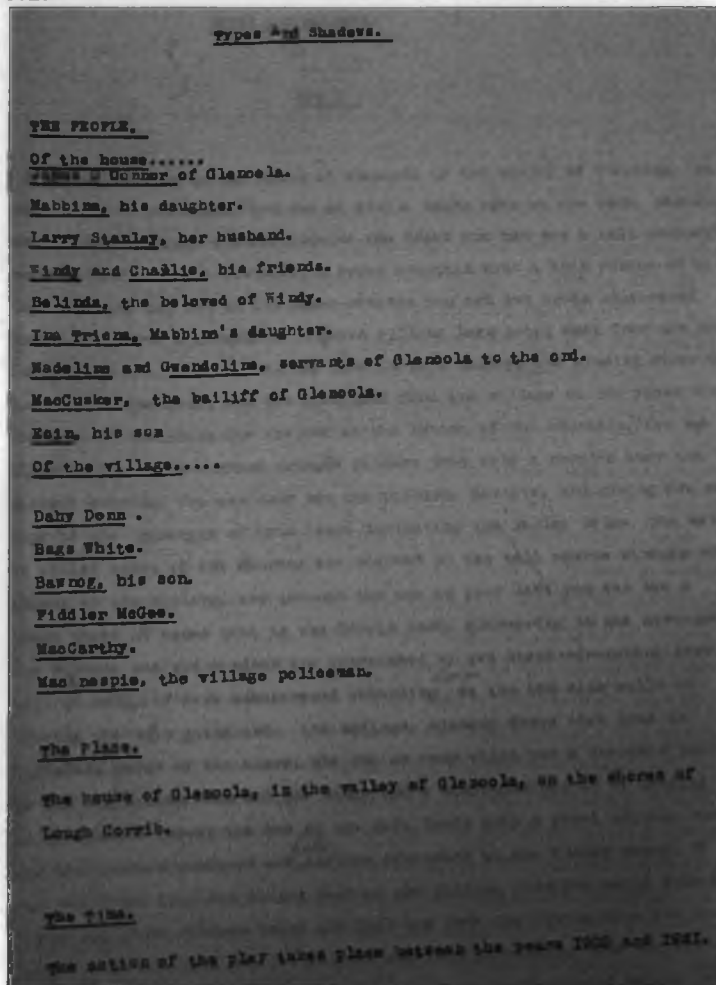
As written, it is a long play (123 pages), much too long, and I found the ending especially too repetitive. The play is set in the period 1900 to 1920 and has a big cast, **Picture 6.19**. Act 1 takes place in 1900, Act 2 in 1920 and Act 3 later in 1920.

The play is set in the large entrance hall of the O'Connor family home in the Glenoola valley, on the shores of Loch Corrib, in Galway. The valley has been the property of the O'Connor family for centuries. James O'Connor, referred to as 'Glenoola', though still the nominal head of the family has withdrawn from the day to day control of the estate since his wife's death and has allowed his daughter, Mabbina, to take charge. An efficient and effective woman, she runs the estate with firmness and fairness with the help of her devoted bailiff, MacCusker. Being a woman and good at the management of the estate



attracts little respect or affection from the locals. Mabbina is described as a hard and, somewhat begrudgingly, as a fair woman.

Picture 6.19



Act one opens in 1900 with the marriage of Mabbina and the attending celebrations. These celebrations embrace the family, their circle of friends and also the villagers. The landowner, while living in the past, is aware that change is coming. He still accepts patronage as normal, the absolute right of ownership of the lands and rivers of the countryside, and a people subservient and expected to be thankful for this benevolence. Mabbina, his heir is without any understanding of the changes taking place about them. She is at best blinded by the family's benevolence and like her father believes that the loyalty and respect of the villagers is theirs by right and owed to the family.

Macken's writing in Act one is littered with pointers to the unreal and increasingly uneasy coexistence between the landowner and the villagers. We meet all the characters and the Act establishes the seeds of growing unrest under the surface between the villagers the estate owner.

The present Master is 'a lonely old man' since the death of his wife and is now isolated by his own choice in the Glenoola valley. He has nothing to do.

Mabbina does it all...She leaves nothing for me to do. I prefer it that way .... She has tied-up Glenoola as tight as a hobble skirt' (Act 1, page 11).

Mabbina has also chosen her husband; Larry Stanley recently retired from the military. She jokingly tells him 'I picked you because you would be a good sire for my son' (Act 1, page 19).

The villagers' involvement in the celebrations are confined to the barn and an all-male deputation to give their good wishes to the family and the newly weds. The split loyalties between the members of the deputation are obvious. None are unreserved supporters of Mabbina and there are also signs of the growing tensions among those in the barn.

The act ends with the death of James O'Connor and the sound of distant singing. This singing has drifted into earlier scenes from time to time and is coming from the celebrations in the barn.

Act 2 takes place in June, 20 years later. The War of Independence is underway. The entrance hall, the door still open, is shabby and some of the paintings are missing. All the characters show signs of age. Larry, through boredom, had an affair and has been gone for 10 years. Mabbina, 'austere with her hair streaked grey', is facing the revolutionary times badly. There is a shortage of money, the War and taxes have taken their toll. Fifty trees from the estate are being sold to a timber contractor from Galway and threats from unidentified sources mean that no one will work for the estate.

It's all the result of that comic opera rebellion in Dublin. Oh, we'll forget it. Carry on the best you can, Madeline. I'll try to get a girl or two from Dublin. Ina will be home to-day anyhow. She'll help out. It's not all this that worries me. It's all the rest. However, we'll fight.... (Mabbina: Act 2, page 7)

Ina, Mabbina's 19 year old daughter and Eoin, son of the Bailiff, though he is five or six years older, had grown up together and there is now an understanding between them (Act 2, page 13).

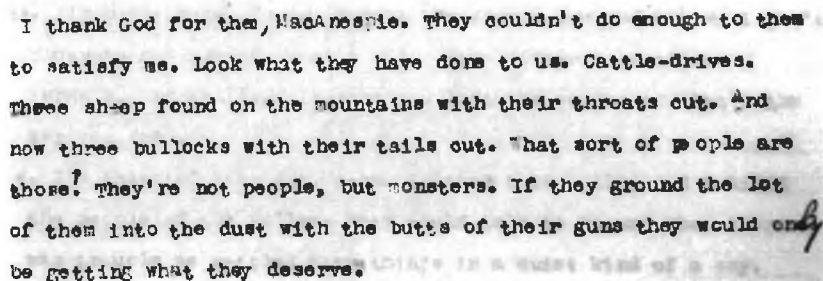
A local deputation led by the shopkeeper's son, Bawnog, demands that Mabbina sells 'at a fair price if it is spread over a long time' forty acres of her good land (Act 2, page 23). They are refused. 'Glenoola is mine, every stick and stone and tree and trickle of water in it and whoever wants a pebble from it will have to come with knives and hack off my hands.' (Mabbina: Act 2, page 27) (**Footnote 6.10**)

The act ends with Mabbina's refusal to contemplate any relationship between Ina and Eoin. Local IRA activities have the British soldiers in the village to arrest sympathisers. The curtain falls on the arrival of the soldiers at Mabbina's door.

The final act is six months later. The isolation of Mabbina by the villagers has turned to violence and persecution. Her farm animals have been killed and mutilated and any investigation by the local policeman has been met with silence from the villagers and refusal to cooperate. The police barracks in a nearby town has been burned out and two policemen killed. The suspects are believed to be from the Glenoola valley area. The Auxiliaries (**Footnote 6.11**, next page) have been sent to the area to restore order and a reprisal is expected for the attack on the police station.

**Footnote 6.10:** Eoin intervenes during this exchange in an attempt to explain the situation to Mabbina. 'There was once a play written where a character who is a policeman says "Haven't we the whole country dependin' on 's to keep law and order. It's those that are down would be up and those that are up would be down, if it wasn't for us." The downs have always come up at their appointed time....' (*Types and Shadows* Act 2, page 25). These are the exact words used by the Sergeant to Policeman B <sup>166</sup> in Lady Gregory's *The Rising of the Moon*. Macken played the Sergeant at the Abbey production in April 1949 (Page 99)

Mabbina's distrust and dislike for the villagers has now turned to bitterness. In a conversation with MacAnespie, the local policeman, she lets her views be known about the arrival of the 'Black and Tans'. **Picture 6.20** (Act 3, page 3)



I thank God for them, MacAnespie. They couldn't do enough to them to satisfy us. Look what they have done to us. Cattle-drives. Three sheep found on the mountains with their throats cut. And now three bullocks with their tails cut. What sort of people are those? They're not people, but monsters. If they ground the lot of them into the dust with the butts of their guns they would only be getting what they deserve.

The leader of the Auxiliaries is a disillusioned Larry. He has survived the war in Europe and calls to see Mabbina and more especially his daughter. There is no forgiveness or understanding between Mabbina and Larry and he leaves more in anger than sorrow. The retreating Auxiliaries come under attack from the IRA and Larry is killed. The Lancia [an open backed lorry used to transport the Auxiliaries] is blown up by the IRA group of which Eoin is a member.

The end comes with part of the village in flames and Mabbina, shocked and accepting defeat, decides she will provide shelter to the homeless people and that she will give them the land that they asked for (Act 3, pages 36, 37). This is all too late. A mob from the village, lead by Bawnog 'raging for blood,' descends on the house. MacCusker attempts to get the women to leave the house. Eoin arrives and with the house in flames takes Mabbina, Ina, and the servants to safety.

Walter Macken, from time to time, used the stories from some of his plays in his books and short stories and vice versa. *Types and Shadows* may have been written as a novel first before being rewritten as a play. The novel entitled *And Then No More* was never published. Evidence in the Wuppertal archive indicates that the novel was written after

**Footnote 6.11:** During the War of Independence the British government in 1920 reinforced the Royal Irish Constabulary with an auxiliary force made up of ex-British soldiers. Their distinctive temporary uniform gave them their nickname of Black-and-Tans. They adopted a policy of harsh reprisals against Republicans, many people being killed in raids and property destroyed. Public opinion in Britain and the USA was shocked and the Black-and-Tans were withdrawn after the Anglo-Irish truce in 1921. (*Dictionary of World History*. Oxford University Press, 2000, page 72)

*Rain on the Wind* but this is not the case. The manuscript was submitted to Macmillan and Co in 1947. The Macmillan letter rejecting the novel, dated 2 October 1947, details their reasons and their advice was ‘... you would waste your time if you tried to revise or prune this work’. The letter is reproduced in full in *Dreams on Paper* (2009, 199-200). This may also explain why Macken later sent the play to Tennent and not to Macmillan and Co.

The 400 page typed manuscript of the novel *And Then No More* can be found in BUW Manuscript folder Nr. 41. The play is taken from the core of the novel. The novel starts some time before the wedding of Mabbina and continues beyond the Irish Civil War (1922-3). I found this extension unnecessary and a distraction from the main theme. The novel also included a parallel story. A brief account of the difference between the play and the novel is in **Appendix 6.12** together with an explanation of the two titles.

### 13. *Home is the Hero*

*Home is the Hero* (1953) <sup>167</sup> is one of Macken’s best known and his most successful play. It is set in a council house in Galway (**Footnote 6.12**).

Paddo O’Reilly, the man of the house, the ‘hero’ of the play is ‘a big fine strong man ... full of fire he always was’ (page 10) and he relies on his strength to coax and intimidate those around him. He is a man accustomed to getting his own way, a bully. But this is cloaked by the times and conventions of the time and the relationships between and within families. The man was to be obeyed, a strong man especially. The public face of the person and the family were all important.

**Footnote 6.12:** As with the earlier plays there are clear comments in *Home is the Hero* on the living conditions at the time. In the opening setting for Act 1 we read ‘... because Councils who build houses for the poorer classes think a toilet in the yard is better than none at all and damn good enough for you.’

Paddo is returning home having served five years for the manslaughter of a neighbour in a drunken brawl. A welcome home has been prepared but the family after five years of relative peace and having worked their way into a tolerable way of life are not so enthusiastic. Money is still a problem for the family as we learn from Daylia, Paddo's wife. She has just returned from the butcher:

The mane hound! 'Me husband comin' home after five years', I says, 'and you begrudge me a bit of black pudden.' Mrs. O'Reilly, he says, 'I'd give you enough black pudden with a heart and a half to sink a battleship if you'd show some signs of payin' for all the black pudden already consumed by you, owing to me...

(Page 3)

Daylia is torn between the excitement of the homecoming and anxiety over the changes that have occurred in the family during the time Paddo was in jail.

Think of the time I had in five years to get a bit to put in yeer mouth. The things I had to do. He won't know all that. He'll expect everything to be just the same.

(Page 8)

Bid, wife of Dovetail, the upstairs lodgers, pays the rent '...a biteen early this week, knowing that times is short' and Daylia tells Bid 'I'm excited ... it's like when we were coortin,' and goes on to tell her, 'No man in Ireland was as proud as Paddo. Couldn't he lift a hundredweight in each hand?' (Page 11)

Paddo's return is a disaster. He avoids the welcoming crowd at the station organised by Dovetail, silences the singing children, accuses Daylia of smelling 'like an empty whiskey barrel' (Page 33) and when he learns about the lodgers tells Daylia 'You could have starved before you took the likes of them into our house. That's what you could have done' (Page 36).

Paddo's changed ways are even visited on his old draughts-playing friend, Trapper O'Flynn. He deliberately sweeps the draught board and pieces from the table:

That was part of it too. You must win at all costs. You must be a better man than Trapper O'Flynn. Don't let Trapper O'Flynn bate you at draughts. Don't let any man in the world be better than you at anything.... Boast about your strength. About how much porter you can drink. No, no more of that. (Page 39)

The 'reformed' Paddo attempts to return the family to the way it was five years earlier and results in him beating his daughter, Josie, terrifying his wife, assaulting the lodger and having a violent stand-off with his crippled son, Willie. He attempts to evict the lodgers whose ten shillings a week kept the family together until Josie went to work and Willie started his shoe-repair business. Paddo's violence spreads beyond the family. He violently opposes Josie's choice of boyfriend and forbids Willie's relationship with the daughter of the man he murdered.

In the end, opposition from Willie and Josie proves too much for Paddo and he leaves.

PADDO.                   What else can I do? Haven't ye defeated me? Won't ye make me name smell in the town with yeer tales if I stay with ye?

....

WILLIE.               You don't have to walk out of it. I'll walk out of it and Josie will walk out of it and you can have it for your own.

DAYLIA.               For the love of God stop talking like that, let ye. What will the people say?

PADDO.               People forget, Daylia. You can remember that. They forget more when they have nothing to look at. Remember that.... (Pages 108)

Dovetail and the local children celebrate Paddo's departure with the bonfire originally prepared for his homecoming. 'When he wouldn't let us light it to welcome him home, why can't we light it to celebrate him goin' away' (Dovetail, page 110).

Trapper, towards the end of the play, gives us an outsider's view of the O'Reilly household:

JOSIE.                   ...What did you think of us all, Trapper, last night say,  
                                  before he came?

TRAPPER.    I thought it was a happy little house. I did that. I thought it was a  
                                  rare place to come for a laugh or a chat. There was nothin'  
                                  upsettin' ye, oney small things that make people happy anyhow.

JOSIE.        I thought we were happy too. He was out to destroy that. Maybe  
                                  we weren't happy, Willie, were we?

WILLIE.       We were. He would have destroyed us.

JOSIE.        What about Mother Willie? What will Mother do without  
                                  him?

WILLIE.       She will cry a lot. Have you ever seen a dog that is terrified  
                                  of its master? I have. It's a terrified love, sort of. That's what  
                                  she has for him. (Page 111)

This is a fine play. The characters are generally credible. They reflect the time and attitudes accurately. Society was stratified and intolerant. There was a prevailing culture of oppression and violence and this was accepted both inside and outside families. The biggest weakness with the play has to rest with Paddo. He is relentless in his attempts to oppress the family. There is no flicker of joy in his life and when played without any understanding, he loses credibility.

*Home is the Hero* was a real success story when first played at the Abbey Theatre during its time at the Queen's Theatre. As we saw in Chapter 4, the play was immediately accepted by Ernest Blythe in June 1952. The play opened at the end of July 1952 and was seen by 92,000 people before it closed in November.



This contrasts with the failure of the play on Broadway and the film. Macken played Paddo in the two failures and it could be that Brian O'Higgins presented a less monstrous Paddo in the Abbey production.

The description of the play by Hogan draws clear parallels with O'Casey's *Juno* and he concludes:

The result is a curiously cold, almost ill-tempered play, although technically it is an adroit example of the best Abbey realism. It is tightly structured, and its characters, with the exception of the Joxerish Dovetail, are drawn with believable restraint. (1968, 68)

#### 14. *The Boola Boy*

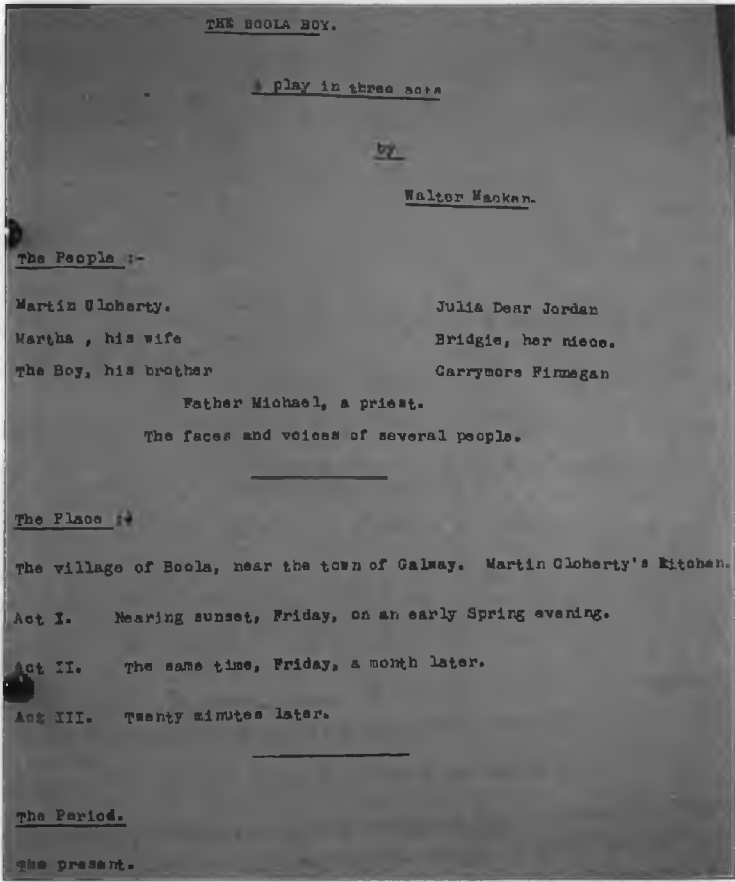
This is a three Act play written about 1954. It is a further example of Macken using the material from one of his novels for a play. *The Boola Boy* is taken from the Macken novel *Sunset on the Window Panes* published in 1954<sup>168</sup>. It cannot be said for sure whether *The Boola Boy* was written before or after *Sunset on the Window Panes*. *The Boola Boy* action corresponds with the end of the novel.

Comparing the novel and the play show the play as a simpler, less complicated, story but also missing some points that are essential to the novel and that would have added to an easier understanding of the action in the play (Footnote 6.13). The reason that Joseph, 'The Boola Boy' in the play, is unable to concentrate on his studies and his flawed facility to recall what he has learned, is clear in the novel. This inability to learn has led to Joseph being 'sent home' from the seminary where he was studying for the priesthood. In the play, he is presented as a bit 'confused' and, being without any explanation for this 'confusion', makes one wonder if he would have been accepted into a seminary in the first place.

**Footnote 6.13:** The edition of *Sunset on the Window Panes* use for this reading was published in 1978 by Pan Books Ltd., in association with Macmillan and Co. Ltd.

Folder 42 in the Wuppertal collection contains an original copy of the play and Folder 96 has two carbon copies of the original. The manuscript is typed, 86 pages, double spaced on foolscap paper.

The play and the novel are both set in the village of Boola, described as being ‘above the Corrib’ north of Galway City (1978, 25). **Picture 6.21** is the title page and also shows the characters and the setting for the play.



The play and the novel have a number of the characters in common. Martha is the woman of the house at the play opening and at this same point in the novel.

Her marriage to Martin (Luke in the novel) was in the face of bitter opposition from Martin's/ Luke's mother.

The mother's opposition is undisguised. When, in the book, Luke and Martha visit Luke's mother and he announced his intention to marry Martha, Luke's mother retorted:

You are going to marry a bastard,' his mother told him, almost gently. 'The girl has no father. Nobody knows her father. Nobody knew her father, not even her mother. Does this not make you ashamed? (1978, 49)

When Luke responds saying that they would move away from the family home Mabbina relented and immediately establishes Martha position in the house by firing the present maid on the spot. The dismissed maid advised Martha 'I know what this is. I know her. If you are here for the reason I think you are, don't stay. Get out. She'll crucify you, I know.' (1978, 51)

It is after Luke's/ Martin's mother has died that the action in the play takes place. *The Boola Boy*, Joseph in the book, is Martin's half brother and he was the firm favourite of his mother. Her crushing ambition was that Joseph would become a priest. Joseph described as tall and thin, studious, but with a 'weak chest' has been studying for the priesthood and was sent home from the seminary because he could not remember/ retain what he was being taught. He was deemed unfit to continue his studies. His return caused his mother to take to her bed and she died shortly afterwards. The business and the farm are inherited by Mabbina's eldest son, Luke/ Martin.

The reason for Joseph's slowness is established early in the book. It is the result of a freak accident that also cause Breedá (called Bridgie in the play) to lose her sight (Page 14 in the novel). Blame for the accident rests with Joseph's other half- brother, Bart. Bart is 'wild' with a streak of irresponsibility. He has already been expelled from school and after the accident leaves the village. The accident, the cause of Joseph's memory difficulties and bad headaches, is mentioned in the novel from time to time. No such explanation is given in the play. In the book Bart returns as the van salesman, Carrymore, while in the play the van salesman is a stand-alone character.

Joseph is exceedingly devout, he is also described as a weakling. In the book, Mabbina on her deathbed charges Luke, Martin in the play, to 'look after Joseph' (1978, 175).

The play opens after the death of the mother and Martha, Martin's wife, has become the woman of the house. Martha dislikes Joseph and requires that he pull his weight with the work around the house and farm. At Martha's insistence, Martin sends Joseph to work in the bog on Boola mountain. There Joseph has a vision of the Virgin. The play revolves around this vision and the effect this has on the village and the surrounding area when the news gets out. Joseph on his return to the house in ecstasy, believing he has seen a vision, tells those present, including the van-salesman, Carrymore, what he has seen. Joseph also predicts a second appearance one month later. Carrymore, with an eye to business, spreads the news well beyond the village and promptly stocks his van with refreshments and religious items in anticipation of an influx of people to the village driven by religious fervour, curiosity and disbelief.

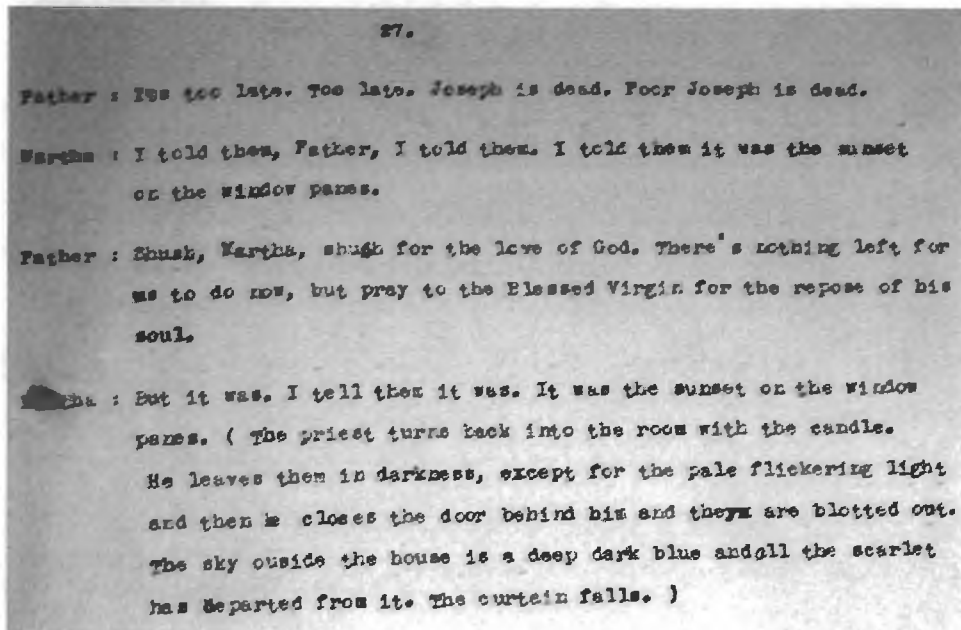
On the day forecast for the second vision (Act 3), the village is swamped by crowds from far and wide. When nothing happens, the crowd becomes a mob and attacks Joseph who is rescued by Carrymore. The local priest rebukes the crowd and they grudgingly disperse. The priest convinces Joseph that his vision was a dream. Joseph, exhausted, apologises to the household 'I'm sorry to ye all. How could I know it was all a dream....' (Act 3, page 11).

Remorsefully, Carrymore confesses 'I brought that crowd of half-baked Catholics down on him' (Act 3, page 14). The priest later visits Joseph in his room and returning to the kitchen, announces that he is dying (Act 3, page 17). Bridgie (the blind girl who also was present in the bog the evening Joseph claimed to see the Virgin), concerned for Joseph, visits the room (Act 3, page 24). **Picture 6.22**

Bridgie : ( as she walks in ): Joseph ! Joseph ! Talk to me Joseph.  
( There is no reply from Joseph but slowly a white light starts to shine in the room as if somebody had turned on a powerful lamp. The light creeps out from the room so that you can see Bridgie clearly standing inside. It escapes from the room and begins to dim the candlelight in the kitchen. It reaches

Bridgie announces that 'the white lady has come back to Joseph' (Act 3, page 25). The play concludes with Martha in distress attempting to explain away the white light as 'the sunset on the window panes' (Act 3, page 27).

### Picture 6.23



This story worked better in the novel than in the reading of the play. The play left too many unresolved questions and would benefit from re-writing and drawing upon some additional background material from the book.

### 15. *Twilight of a Warrior*<sup>169</sup>

*Twilight of a Warrior* bears some resemblance to the earlier *Types and Shadows*, where Macken offered a view of the decay of the landlord system in the early part of the twentieth century and the violent establishment of the Irish State. The central character in *Types and Shadows* is a strong woman for whom time stood still and who is eventually beaten by time. As Eoin tells her in Act two (page 25)

The downs [the downtrodden] have always come up at their appointed time. They come up bloodily Miss Mabbina or they come up without blood. But they come up, when they have reached their appointed time in history.

Dacey Adam the central character in *Twilight of a Warrior* is of that time. An IRA hero, he fought in the 'Troubles' and the Civil War and has carried his 'war' into the peace. He must assert himself all the time so that he goes from one 'victory' to the next in civilian life. He is also a disillusioned man with the way the much sought after independence appears to have been squandered. We could think of him as a mix of the characters, Eoin, prepared to fight for what he wants and appearing to have a realistic view of people and the times, and Bawnog, the bullying and crafty shopkeeper who Eoin foresees making his progress in the new Ireland "...making speeches over our graves and then going home to count the profits." (*Types and Shadows*: Act 3, page 8)

Like many of Macken's plays, *Twilight of a Warrior* (1955), obeys the 'unities' of time, action and place. The setting is a room in Dacey Adam's house, carefully furnished and set in great detail, with the action of the play completed in one autumn afternoon.

Dacey's 'victories' in civilian life are to do with control of his family and all around him to the point of subservience. Gubby, his sister, is his eyes and ears and has a poisonous tongue. His brother, Affy, a World War I hero, has a drink problem and is now compliant. Elva, his daughter, is completely controlled by her father who systematically destroys her 'unsuitable' suitors. From a craft background, Dacey has married the daughter of a local business man and now runs the firm but the ownership of the company is in the hands of his wife, Nessa. She alone in the family withstands Dacey's bullying and aggressive tactics. Ross, their son, 'Another disappointment' (Page 52), writes poetry. Into this dysfunctional family Elva brings Abel, a much travelled but illegitimate country man, to ask Dacey for permission for them to marry.

The play deals with the confrontation between Dacey and Abel and the surrounding happenings in the Adam household during that autumn afternoon. This presents a major

problem for the play and the audience. Presenting the play with an interval does this taut story and the writing a disservice. The play, if played today, I believe, would be presented without a break for maximum effect and audience satisfaction. Macken in his writing of the play does indicate where breaks could be considered but any reader of the script will feel that to break concentration at those points would cause near fatal damage to the overall story.

Dacey, without giving any indication of what type of individual would meet his standard as a suitable suitor for Elva, sets about the destruction of the relationship between Elva and Abel in a cold and calculating fashion. Abel hands Dacey a trump card when he admits, without any inhibitions, that he is illegitimate.

Abel.                                I don't know who my father was.  
Dacey.                              You mean you're a bastard!  
Abel.                                That's the technical term, I believe.  
Dacey.                              Oh God, this is the best yet. Oh man, this is supreme.... By God  
   Elva can pick them... (Page 18)

But it is with the 'Mary Ann' story that Dacey decides to destroy Abel. Mary Ann Martin was Abel's mother. She rescued Dacey when he was seriously injured after a skirmish during the War of Independence. Her story threads through the play from page 43 to the end. She hid Dacey from the pursuing soldiers and nursed him back to health. Dacey promised her 'When it is all over, Mary Ann, I will come to back to you ...' (Page 45). He does not do so. It was many years later that he meets Mary Ann again and she was then a broken woman living in poverty. All he could offer her was the contents of his wallet. He tells Abel, 'I couldn't look her in the face, see, I just pushed all the money into her hand and ran, like a rat, like a dirty stinking lousy rat, I ran' (Page 60). **Footnote 6.14**

**Footnote: 6.14:** One of the stories in the *City of the Tribes*, Macken last book of short-stories, is *Deputy Johnny*. This is the 'Mary Ann' story as told by Dacey Adam in *Twilight of a Warrior*. *City of the Tribes* was first published in 1997 by Brandon. A paperback edition was published in 2001, also by Brandon. Two copies of *Deputy Johnny* are in the BUW Folder 74. They are described as unpublished and dated 1977.

Having failed to shake Abel's resolve, Dacey acknowledges 'It is going to be a terrible job getting you out of her system' (Page 81) and he asks Abel to go and tell Elva that it is all over. 'I 'm asking no more of you than I would ask of, say, a good dutiful son, that's all' (Page 82). Abel appears to calmly accept this insinuation. He delivers his farewell with the assurance of a person who knows Dacey is lying.

Dacey's almost immediate change of heart may have been influenced by the earlier confrontation with Nessa over their son, Ross, about to be arrested for an admitted homicide. Perhaps he realised how low he has sunk to get his own way. Maybe Dacey, unlike Paddo in *Home is the Hero*, retains a spark of understanding and kindness. He calls Abel back, admits that he loved Mary Ann and he is not Abel's father.

The characters in *Twilight* are well drawn. We learn a lot about Dacey, Elva and Abel. We learn somewhat less about Gubby, Affy, and Ross. Their contributions to the story are in the contrasts they bring to the dominant Dacey. Gubby represents the pious and religious extremes and her devotion to Dacey and all he represented, the fighter for Ireland, the hero. Affy, an acknowledged hero on a greater stage, has been written out of the family history, as was World War I in official Irish annals until relatively recently. Ross is a disappointment to Dacey. Dacey asks (Page 52) 'How is it that the sons of men rarely live up to them? This fellow should have been strong, with character.' Ross writes poetry, obeys Dacey and is a drunk. Nessa, Dacey's wife, a strong woman alienated by his behaviour, finds comfort with former friends. Dr. Gilanders, Nessa's childhood friend, is a more shadowy figure and has at least a platonic relationship with Nessa. The Garda Sergeant is presented clearly as an honest man. A contrast to Dacey, he is a threat to Dacey's patent abuse of power and being a former colleague at arms, shows Dacey to be the antithesis of his former self.

The actor playing Dacey needs to draw from the whole circumstance of the action including the 'Mary Ann' affair, to make the play work. It is this strength and Macken's words that give the play its menace and its power. The play's ending slows the action; it



should end with Dacey's collapse and death. The conversation with Abel about the 'Black Eminence' is a distraction and unnecessary (Page 85).

**Appendix 6.6** lists the original cast and **Appendix 4.11** contains the reviews.

## 16. *Look in the Looking Glass* <sup>170</sup>

*Look in the Looking Glass* (1958) tells the story of Michael Moran (Mico), the rustic Homer of Claddabaun. Mico has written a play called *The Pookey* that has had a successful run in Dublin. He returns to his home village a triumphant hero, lauded by the people in the village for his success and for the fame he will bring to them all. Only one of the villagers has seen the play, Ceolaun, the hackney driver, sent to bring Mico home from Dublin.

The opening draws us into the preparations and the excitement of the homecoming. Within the family there are mixed feelings about Mico's success. His father, Peter, is not convinced about all the fuss, '... no good will come of all this fiddling' (Page 3). Janey, the orphan, who works for the local shopkeeper, is the romantic interest. She wonders if 'It won't change him... all the talk, all the cheering?' (Page 6)

Macken has created one of his fine characters in Stopper Collins, the local politician, shopkeeper and wheeler dealer. He sees the advantage of having a 'celebrity' in the village for business and other reasons. 'It's a great thing I said, to have a scribbler in the village, look what your man Yeats did for Sligo!' (Page 7)

Mico's mother appears unperturbed when Janey mentions that not one of the villagers, except Ceolaun, has seen the play. 'What matter? I'm his mother and I never read it. He was very drawn back about it. But we all saw what the papers said about it.'

Another unimpressed person is Turloc, a local with an interest in dynamite and Janey. He has little regard for Mico.

....whoever heard of Mico until now? A lazy man, the only exercise he ever took was chewing the end of a pencil.... A fellow like that. The same as a penny balloon, blow and blow and he bursts. (Page 11)

The surface excitement, celebration and pride overlay the dissatisfaction Mico feels for the welcoming committee. 'Stopper' acknowledges Ceolaun's role in the event. 'No one travelled to support Mico but Ceolaun ... sent to Dublin in his own hackney to meet you.' He later tells Ceolaun that he is the only man 'in seven villages apart from the school teacher in Claddaduv, next door, who has seen it' (Page 18).

Ceolaun describes the play to the villagers and it is obvious to the listeners that the characters are the village inhabitants. When he realises the reaction is turning sour, he quickly backtracks 'But it all worked out in the end...' This is too late, the damage is done. Stopper is 'in the mood for murder...' and Ceolaun is left reflecting 'They were nice people in the play, nicer than here' (Page 22).

The extent of the damage becomes clear in the second Act. Sarah, the unmarried mother of Janey, tells Mico, '... she never knew but now she will know....' (Page 30)

In Chapter 4, page 159, we mentioned Blythe's concern about the number of Sarah's illegitimate children in the original script. Macken eliminated two in his rewrite and left Janey. Janey is described as an orphan and 'adopted' by Stopper Collins. This is the village solving its own problems internally and cheap labour for Stopper (Blythe papers, P24/ 756/ 18).

Now Stopper won't pay Ceolaun the hackney fare for the Dublin journey and Ceolaun tried to make amends by telling the villagers that they weren't in the play at all. Mico ends the act trying to explain to Janey

.... How was I to know that all this would emerge? All I did was to hold up that damn mirror and watch all the wraiths turning into realities. (Page 35)

As in most of Macken's early plays, violence is a feature here. Turloc and Mico fight at the end Act two (Page 37) and there is a riot in Act three at the Moran's house. The riot is organised by Stopper (Page 55) with some outside help. He told the villagers that Sarah has drowned in the river and the revelation about Sarah in Mico play has led to this tragedy. Sarah has fallen into the river and is unharmed and it is Sarah that rescues Mico from the mob.

The intervention of the Parish Priest and the Garda Sergeant resolve the differences to everyone's satisfaction, (Page 57). (Footnote 6.15)

MICO.                                So the parish priest was up to see you Stopper.  
STOPPER.                        He was God bless him, and didn't he give me a great account  
   of *The Pookey* play. He says we'll all be famous after it ....

The play ends with Janey and Mico in the kitchen. Mico has started writing a new play.

MICO:                                ....[Showing her the title page] Doesn't it look lovely. *The*  
   ~~*Mirror of Homer*~~ *Look in the Looking Glass*  
JANEY:                                Oh Mico, will it always be like this, tell me, will it always be like  
   this?

MK in *The Irish Times* wrote that the first act was '...short and funny, the second short, skimpy and disjointed, and the third falls back on Mr. Macken's old and apparently abandoned resource – physical violence.'

**Footnote 6.15:** The story of this play is also one of Macken's short stories. In the short story, six of the characters each present their own version of the events arising from the performance of Mico's play. The short story, called *Characters in Order of Appearance*, is mentioned in a letter from Macmillan dated 15 September 1965 (BUW Folder 68). The story was published in the short story collection *The Grass of the People*. Dingle: Brandon, 1998.

This play is a comedy, light and enjoyable, if a bit sentimental. The violence is overdone. The idea that the irate villagers would bring in outsiders to lay siege to the Moran house does not ring true. Realistically, this would be a matter they would deal with themselves.

Stopper Collins is a fine part. Mico stretches the imagination. How he is played is crucial. Is he is totally out of touch, not only, with the village but with the world or if he is just one of those people who sees life as it is and see no harm in writing about it?

The original cast <sup>171</sup> is listed in **Appendix 6.6**.

### **17. *Saint on a Sunday***

Copies of this play are in Wuppertal manuscript folders number 65 and 95. Folder 65 contains a carbon copy and a third copy. The one copy in folder 95 appears to be a final draft but there is no way this can be confirmed. There is also no indication of the date of writing. Placing it before *The Voices of Doolin* is a convenience as it could easily post-date the 1960 play. It would seem likely the play was written about the same time as *Look in the Looking Glass*. Its setting, style and story line may also show signs of Macken's own American experiences.

It is a long play, 75 fools-cap pages, single spacing, written in three acts, with a cast of four women and eight men. Accepting the criticism of Macken's over-writing style made by Hogan and throughout this work, it is important to read this play and his other plays with a view to distilling from the writing a tighter play moving at a satisfactory pace without altering or diminishing the story.

*Saint on a Sunday* is a surprisingly good read. The story is well constructed and the characters are perhaps closer to those in *Look in the Looking Glass*.

The play concerns Finbar, a reformed drunk, his wife, Josie and their two children, Feilim and Mary Jo. The family are settled in a newly renovated farmhouse on a run-down farm

in a country village. Finbar ran a successful business in the nearby town but his drinking proved a liability and he is now removed from his prominent and influential position with the company. It was his business acumen that made the company a success. The company is now failing and the other directors, believing that they could prevent the failure have removed him.

Finbar, knowing that he is the brains behind the company, confidently expects a recall to his former position as the company continues to do poorly. For the present he has an idea to develop an ice-house at the local river and a fresh water fishing industry for the village.

Finbar and his ideas maintain his interest in his new life while Josie, his wife, though hard working and accepting their changed circumstances, has committed herself to her life as a farmer's wife. She does miss the comforts associated with her past city life. Finbar has some interest in his farm but leaves the actual farming to his farm-labourer, Turlough. Feilim likes farm life while Mary Jo hates everything about it and the village.

Mary Jo has 'turned the heads' of most of the eligible village men and this includes Jimjohn a local successful farmer. Until the arrival of Mary Jo, Jimjohn was to be matched to Minnie, the daughter of the hard-nosed village postmistress, Maggie Minogue. Maggie's business includes as well as the post office, the village shop and public house. Feilim has shown an interest in Minnie, unaware that Minnie is still interested in Jimjohn.

Act one ends with Mary Jo deciding that she will audition to play St. Bridget, the name part, in a planned new film being promoted throughout the country. Auditions are underway and if successful she will rescue the family from their poor circumstances.

We meet the main characters in Act one with the exception of the film company representatives. The action is set in the kitchen of the farmhouse.

Act two takes place the following Sunday evening in the same setting.

Mary Jo is returning home from her audition and has invited the film director, his aide and the camera-man to stay at the farm house. The villagers are excited at the prospect of the arrival of the film company representatives. Josie is in panic about the bedding arrangements and Maggie, in marked contrast with her hostile attitude to the family in Act 1, has sent daughter Minnie to help with arrangements. Maggie herself arrives with a bottle of whiskey for the celebration and is now amenable to Finbar's ice-house plan. She offers him a field by the river in a barter agreement for a modern radio/ gramophone. All are in the kitchen including the postman and Turlough, the farm-labourer, when Mary Jo and the three visitors arrive.

After introductions, Blosch, the producer, organises a mock filming scene and the celebration moves to the village pub (owned by Maggie). Mary Jo, Blosch and Minnie, who is changing to her day clothes after an earlier dressing-up escapade, remain at the farmhouse. The Act ends with Blosch offering Mary Jo her way to 'fame and fortune' by way of the casting couch. This conversation is overheard by Minnie.

Act three takes place the following morning.

Mary Jo confirms that she has been offered the part but seems subdued about her success. Initially the parents are looking forward to a return to their former life in the city but show some uncertainty about the offer. Mary Jo finds this uncertainty '... a bit too much.... I wanted what I'm getting for you and mother more than I wanted it for myself even' (Act 3, page 2).

Mary Jo wants respect for Finbar and the family again and berates her father for drinking the business 'into the dust' and throwing hundreds of men out of work. She tells them that when she was with Blosch in the hotel for the audition, she saw the confusion in the eyes of the onlookers, wondering if the Fagans were on the way up again and '... does it behove us once more to be nice to the Fagan's? [sic]' (Page 3)

But Mary Jo has been duped by Blossch. Paul Winter, the camera man, after a confrontation with Blossch, decides to expose the charade to her:

I'll be brutal, Mary Jo. If you were stupid enough to let Blossch strip you physically, I'll be brutal enough to strip you the other way. It's no good Mary Jo. It's all hooley. You will never see America. You will never play St. Bridget.

(Act 3, page 9)

The conversation is overheard by Minnie.

Winter goes on to explain that the charade is to gain publicity and that the film is already in production.

It will cost less than a single advertisement in block in an American magazine. Every paper in the country, big and small will carry the news of the famous search so that when the picture is made, there won't be a sinner in the whole country who won't be in a dither to see it.

(Act 3, page 10)

In spite of Mary Jo's disbelief Paul Winter goes on to encourage her to tell her people 'Tell them you refused [the part]. Tell them he made an attack on your virtue and that you turned him down. Whether you did or not.' Winter further suggests how Mary Jo and her family's self-respect may be somewhat restored. This would also be timely revenge for him.

#### Picture 6.24

**Paul** : There is only one way to hurt Blossch, Mary Jo. He can be hurt in his body. His lovely body. If a caterpillar landed on his hand he would nearly die of fright. If he saw a raised fist coming towards his patrician nose, he would suffer untold agonies.

**Mary Jo** : Well what do you want me to do ? Go out there and tear the eyes out of his head with my bare hands.

**Paul** : No. Just tell your people and God may look after the rest.

(Act 3, page 11)

The Americans leave for their return journey to Galway and Winter continues his plan for revenge by leaving his camera behind. Mary Jo confesses to her parents, 'I went to him. I signed the contract. And it's all a farce'. The implication is too much for Feilim and the restoration of the Family's position in the eyes of the villagers unravels. Only the postman shows any understanding. 'It could happen to a bishop, miss to be a saint on a Sunday and a man on a Monday. It's human nature' (Act 3, page 15).

The play concludes with the return of the Americans for the camera. Blossch is enticed into the kitchen and Finbar tells Josie to go out and feed the hens again 'When you hear the car going away again, you can come back into the house. By then the house will be clean again.' (Act 3, page 23)

After reading this play I wondered why Macken wrote it. Could he have been influenced by the excitement generated by the making of the film, *The Quiet Man*, by John Ford in 1951? That filming took place at Cong a village across Loch Corrib from Macken's home in Oughterard.

*Saint on a Sunday* is a comedy but reads like a revenge play. It is attack on the American film industry standards, the deferential attitude of the Irish public towards Americans and the greed and hypocrisy of the Irish towards each other.

#### 18. *The Voices of Doolin* <sup>172</sup>

*The Voices of Doolin* is Macken's last play to be publicly performed. It received its premiere at the Gaiety Theatre on the 15 September 1960 as part of the Dublin Theatre Festival and was produced by Cyril Cusack Productions.

Copies of the original handwritten script and associated notes as well as the programme use for the production are in the Wuppertal archive, Folders 17 and 40. **Appendix 4.19** reproduces Macken's note on the setting and a sample page from the handwritten script.



The play was toured to Clonmel, New Ross and Carlow before opening at the Gaiety in September 1960, see **Picture 4.38** for the cast page from the programme (BUW Folder 40).

*The Voices of Doolin* is a play about the alcoholic Doolin's attempts to rehabilitate himself in the eyes of his family and his workers and in doing so to provide for both through his doll-making factory. It is the story of this inner struggle and the effect reaching this point has had on his wife and their three, now adult, children. The play opens well but by Act two the dialogue becomes tedious and repetitive. Doolin is a man facing his demons and is a character with whom any reader or audience can feel sympathy. There is substance in Doolin but the other characters are less well drawn.

The play is quite different to Macken's other plays in that it tackles and attempts to expose a known and largely suppressed social problem. Denial is a major part of the Irish psyche and to tackle a subject that at the time was certainly denied in Irish society is a challenge to any playwright. The play received mixed reviews but Macken did create a fine character in the doll-maker, Doolin. The reviews from the Irish national papers are in **Appendix 4.11**.

With this play Macken's writing makes its first step from the de Valera Ireland of hoped-for self-sufficiency, the cosy world of the country kitchen, the unfulfilled national aspirations of the republican into the Lemass Ireland of industry development and commercial practicalities.

In the play we see Doolin's inner troubles but we see only glimpses of the family's suffering as a balance to their final reactions to his drinking. As a result they appear heartless and without sympathy or understanding for the situation and have all the appearance of a dysfunctional family.

The play opens with Doolin having been checked out of a mental institution by his son, Declan, after a six months confinement. His committal was partly by agreement but actually manipulated by Morgan Cumisky, the efficiency expert, now arranging the sale of the doll-making business on the family's instructions. It was Doolin's first stay in this particular institute and the shock of this experience has shaken him. He explains this to his wife Julia late in the play. 'This is different, this time, Julia because I saw those men with the empty eyes' (Page 57).

Doolin refuses to cooperate when faced with the sale of the factory because it will result in the loss of the workers' jobs and the replacement of the china doll by a plastic doll.

Morgan Cumisky, employed to complete this sale, has the full support of the family, Julia, Doolin's wife, and two of their children, Rose and Declan. The promised sale of the enterprise is to provide for all their futures. Morgan is engaged to marry Rose but he does not have the support of the younger daughter, Claire.

Doolin's release is intended to secure his signature on the sale documents. He refuses to sign the papers in the asylum, as Declan explains to the family, 'How can a lunatic, legally, sign a paper he said. He's right. In a place like that his signature is worthless' (Page 18). On arrival home Doolin is clearly distracted.

We get an insight into his state of mind when in a conversation about this he tells Claire 'I was a maker of dolls. Dolls are my people, not humans' (Page 25). Julia is less than enthusiastic about the home coming and makes this clear to Declan, 'Why on earth couldn't you have persuaded him [to sign the sale agreement] without letting him home?' (Page 30)

Julia does give us a clue to their relationship:

Maybe I was partly to blame for what he became. He always had two worlds to live in - the world of fantasy and the world of reality. He could switch his way

from one to another without trouble. I couldn't. So maybe he had to go too often to his dream world unaccompanied. (Page 32)

Every attempt is made to push the sale through and the family, in the face of opposition from Claire, agree to this. Declan tells Morgan: 'You will have to force him, Morgan, force him. My God, there is only a big hole to fall into, if you don't force him'. Morgan is satisfied that 'I have you all behind me, so that we are all a solid phalanx lined up against a small weak charming maker of dolls.' (Page 33)

In Act two Doolin turns to his family and others for support and help with his fight back. His plea to Morgan is rejected.

Who cares about your salvation? That the trouble with people like you. You think of yourselves. How you are feeling, how you are doing, what's happening to YOU. It's no wonder your eyes should be emptying when you have thrown away the love and welfare of all the people it is your duty to protect. Try thinking of them, instead of your withering self. (Page 40)

Doolin fails to secure the confidence of his wife, son and daughter and of an old work colleague. They are not prepared to be disappointed again. The family believe they have their future secured if the sale of the factory is completed. As Julia remarks to Doolin 'I'm thinking of myself now, myself and my children.' (Page 58) The act ends with Morgan bringing Doolin a bottle of whiskey, 'I know how this will clear your head.' (Page 65)

Act three opens with Doolin agonising over the whiskey and 'the voices' that are distracting and tormenting him (Footnote 6.16, next page). But when Morgan makes a pass at Claire, Doolin is shocked into recovery. His mind becomes clear. The past failings of Julia are revealed and the stealing of the firm's money by Declan, now in collusion with Morgan who has been paid by the purchasing company to see the sale completed, is also exposed.

Doolin refuses to sign the contract of sale. The deal falls through and all but Claire desert him.

JULIA. I have waited too long. You have destroyed the future. We have no alternative but to look after ourselves. (Page 101)

The play ends with Doolin planning to re-establish the factory, encouraged by Claire and his employees. His last lines are for Julia:

....One day I will give voices to my dolls and they will speak for me. Sometime, someday she will hear them and the voice of the new Doolin will sound in her ear, and she will know, and she will raise her eyes. (Page 106)

The play was written for Cyril Cusack and the play's acceptance at the time must have been in no small way due to his performance. Hogan described the role.

It is a challenging acting role, one of the most fully drawn in any Irish play of recent years.... One can see Macken's growth from theatrical simplicity to a complexity reflecting real life. (1968, 70)

## 19. *The Instigator*

*The Instigator* is a one Act play. A letter from Hilton Edwards, writing as Head of Drama at Irish Television, to Walter Macken on 21 September 1961 mentions 'I am encouraged to know that you should soon be able to work on *The Instigator*.' This would place it about 1961 or 1962 <sup>173</sup>. The manuscript is typed, 18 pages plus cover page and is in BUW Manuscript Folder Nr. 55.

**Footnote 6.16:** One would wonder if Doolin's voices were like the hallucinations' faced by Brutus Jones in the O'Neill play <sup>174</sup> *The Emperor Jones*. Were they the voiceless reminders of his past misdeeds or 'The little formless fears' Jones meets in scene 2, or both? Macken played Brutus Jones in the Taibhdhearc production of the play in 1941 (Picture 2.22); a performance remarked upon by Edward Shaughnessy in his book <sup>175</sup> *Eugene O'Neill in Ireland*, 'The Critical Reception'. It is also possible that the dialogue in the O'Neill play, written in the vernacular of the black person of the time, may have encouraged Macken to use the 'Galway accent' in his English-language 'Galway plays'.

The play is a tale of the supernatural. It is a ghost story. It is set in the present and concerns the preparation by villagers for a pageant based on an historical event that occurred in the village during the 1798 rebellion in Ireland (Footnote 6.17). The preparation for the pageant is controlled by a committee. The director, who is also playing the central character, is having a last rehearsal before the public presentation on the following day. The set is a cross roads with an oak tree at its centre. The time is evening, just before sunset in late June.

The play opens with the peaceful scene disturbed by the sound of kettle-drums as a parade lead by a man in army uniform marches into view. Behind him are the drummers leading three prisoners who are in turn followed by three soldiers in redcoat uniforms carrying muskets with bayonets fixed. Behind the soldiers come some women and children in appropriate costume for the period and then a group of the ordinary village inhabitants dressed in modern clothing, women in summer dresses, sandals and the men in shirts, trousers and carrying jackets. It is a warm evening. Setting the scene for the action the director (Murt) in his leader's uniform reads this opening address.

In the year 1798, the village of Coldquay oppressed beyond human endurance, rose as one man to throw off the yoke of the English oppressor.... Making an example of the heroic village the hated Yeomen under their Captain after a drumhead court-martial took three men of the village, and called the inhabitants at the point of the bayonet, to witness the example they were going to make of them at the crossroads of the Hanging Tree... (Page 3)

**Footnote 6.17:** *The Instigator* parallels the 'Stranger' in the 1973 Clint Eastwood film <sup>176</sup>, *High Plains Drifter*. The supernatural connections are echoed. Both characters take complete control of the people in acts of revenge that leave destruction or near destruction in their wake. Denis Johnston's expressionist play <sup>177</sup> *The Old Lady Says "No"* moves also between the past and the present. The action of the play takes place in 1803 and the actor playing Robert Emmet is knocked out during his arrest by the yeomen. On regaining consciousness he believes he is 'Emmet' and the play chronicles his adventure through Johnston's cynical Dublin of the 1920s. By contrast, the yeoman Captain Burwell, in Macken's play, is welcomed by the pageant director (Page 310), who totally accepts Burwell for his knowledge and authority with almost tragic results. Macken was a realistic writer. He branched into expressionism in *The Whistling Woman* and *Saint on a Sunday* but without the barbed ridicule and caricature of the Johnston play.

There is much confusion and playacting among the villagers and this also extends to the three condemned men who have been 'sentenced to hang'. Into this confusion appears a stranger, who takes over the proceedings. He is perfectly dressed as a Yeoman Captain. His wig is impeccable.

**Picture 6.25 (Page 11)**

Captain : You want to do it much better than you did the last time.  
Murt : ( doing a double take , legitimately. ) And w no the hell are you ?  
Captain : I am Capta-in Lionel Burwell.  
Murt : Fine , but what are you doing here?  
Captain: I was sent to help you.  
Murt : By who, tell me, just tell me by who ?  
Captain: The Instigator.

The firm hand of Captain Burwell has the desired results. The escort soldiers respond with military force to control the 'rebellious' villagers, keeping them at a distance while the preparations for the hangings are completed. Murt is very impressed, 'This is marvellous, Captain. This was what I wanted, This is realism. Pity it isn't tomorrow, Captain' (Page 14). But Murt's satisfaction is short lived when he and the other players realise what is about to happen.

**Picture 6.26 (Page 15)**

Murt : Here what's up with you ? Are you a madman ? Here where did you come from ? What are you doing? Stop him, here, stop him!  
( His voice rises almost to a scream) Look what he is going to do.'

*You see Cleffey and  
reelley throwing away  
the deames, running  
and holding the legs of  
the men as they fall  
from the cart, then  
falling.*

( He runs forward, he is too late. The Captain raises his sword and brings it down on the horse. The horse jumps and runs forward, knocking Ann't I to the ground. The wheel of the cart goes over him. He roars. Turloc screams too. He calls Murt and then you hear his voice being strangled. You see the legs of the two men hanging and Sonny who had no noose about his neck falling in the cart and being tossed from side to side. Now there is a terrified silence, and then genuine screams from the women.

With an actual hanging just prevented and the Captain 'gone as if he has been swallowed by the evening' John Joe Hannify, the committee member, arrives and is asked to account for the appearance of the Captain.

**Picture 6.27 (Page 17)**

John Joe : Captain Lionel Burwell ? ( He thinks. Suddenly he starts to laugh, shaking all over. ) Now, you are really pulling my leg , Murt. Man, you're a comic. Burwell was the Captain in charge of the yeomen who hanged Burton, Geoghan and Aguire in 1798. What are you trying to do Murt ? What's the idea, Captain Lionel Burwell. ( He laughs again. But nobody laughs with him. There is a chilly silence. ) Listen, are you serious ? (Nobody answers him.) Maybe it was some joker If there was a captain. Are ye all in this? I can take a joke as well as the next man, but what is this about?

Murt is adamant about adjusting the ending of the pageant on the performance day.

John Joe's protests 'But what use is the pageant without the hanging'.

There will be no hanging. The procession will come up the road. There will be weeping and calling.... The three men will be up on the cart with their arms tied and they'll just pass out of view.... (Page 18)

*The Instigator* would appear to have been written with TV in mind. It could also be considered for an actual pageant. It has a large cast, 14 named cast members and additional villager. According to the script, there is also a requirement for a horse and cart. I thought it a better short story than a play.

**20. *The Last Gentleman* and 21. *Merchant's Road***

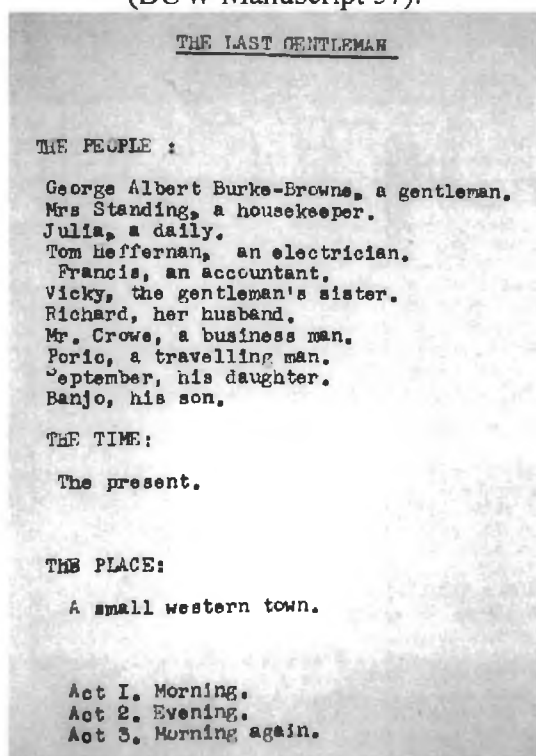
The manuscript for *The Last Gentleman* is undated. It is possibly that the play was written about 1960. The play is an early version of *Merchant's Road*. The play has a cast of seven men and four women and is 68 pages long. The action takes place in the living room of *The Last Gentleman's* house. By comparison, *Merchant's Road* has a cast of seven men and three women and is 64 pages long. The action takes place in the living room of the 'merchant' John Power's house. This manuscript is dated 22 February 1963.

Both plays are in three acts and the story line is similar.

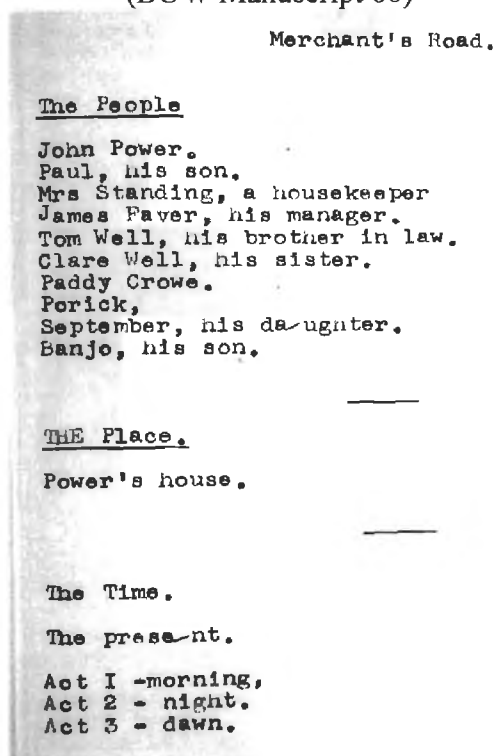
The significant difference between the plays is the addition of the character Paul, estranged son of the John Power, in *Merchant's Road*. Other characters are identical except for the two extra characters, Julia, a daily help and Tom Heffernan, an electrician, in *The last Gentleman*. The name of September's father, the visiting 'Traveller', shows a minor spelling difference, Poric becomes Porick in *Merchant's Road*, **Picture 6.28**.

The action of both plays takes place during approximately a 24 hours period and allows for natural breaks in the action.

**Picture 6.28(a) *The Last Gentleman***  
(BUW Manuscript 57).



**Picture 6.28(b) *Merchant's Road***  
(BUW Manuscript 60)



The gentleman, Burke-Browne, and the merchant, John Power, have both lost their fortunes and are deeply in debt. Neither wants to admit their imminent bankruptcy. In a final attempt to save their positions both invite a successful and wealthy business man (Crowe) and a well to do family member (a sister and her husband) to provide money to redeem the situation. They offer this help on their own terms and are refused.



Burke-Browne and Power are widowers. Their wives died years earlier in child-birth. Burke-Browne's wife bore him a daughter who also died while a son was born to Power. The son is Paul who features prominently in the play. Power blames his son for the tragic death of his wife and Paul's upbringing has been tainted by this attitude. The relationship between father and son is hostile.

When September, a 'tinker' girl, is sent to the house by the departing Mrs. Standing, Burke-Browne and Power accept the idea that she becomes housekeeper. (Footnote 6.18) In this we witness the extremes in Irish society coming together for very different reasons. In both plays September is sent to wash and to dress herself from an upstairs wardrobe before she starts work. The newly presented September reminds both men of their dead wife. Shortly afterwards September is joined by her father, Poric/ Porick and her retarded brother Banjo. The father and Banjo are retained as house helpers and after washing are dressed appropriately.

It is this traveller group with September as cook/ housekeeper that prepare dinner and wait on the visitors when they arrive for their meeting with the gentleman/ merchant to discuss the men's respective financial plight.

Later that evening both men invite September to view the garden and here the action in the plays diverge.

September returns in a distressed state to the living room having been outside with Burke-Browne in *The Last Gentleman* and exclaims to her father, Poric, 'I tell you. He is kneeling out there on a flag and he is crying. I have never seen a man crying, Poric'

**Footnote 6.18:** Tinkers, now called Travellers, are an itinerant population. At the time of this play they were less well organised than today and in receipt of few benefits. In the 1950s and 1960s they travelled the roads of Ireland in small groups of three or four families. Horse drawn caravans and wagons were their means of transportation. They pitched their tents at the side of the road and allowed their horses to graze on the verge. The men were tin smiths and as well as making mugs, jugs and buckets they also repaired kitchen utensils. The women and children were beggars and would call to farm, town and city houses for money, food and clothing. The men also traded in horses and other animals. Macken introduces the tinker character in many of his plays, novels and short stories. Mowleogs in *Mungo's Mansion* was one or at least a settled tinker, Fixit in *Vacant Possession* and Poric and family in *The Last Gentleman* and *Merchants Road* are examples. In his short story *Battle* from *City of the Tribes* we have a fictitious account of tinkers fighting during a fair day in Galway. In the novel *The Bogman*,<sup>178</sup> Cathal Kinsella first meets the tinkers, Nessa and Danno at the Holy Well (page 83). Tinkers were sometimes referred to as 'trickeyes'.

It is at this point in the play that Burke-Browne finally accepts his impossible financial position. September explains to Poric, **Picture 6.29**.

This place is not there, you see, the place he remembered. You cannot get near it. There is a stone pillar but it is toppled on the grass. There is no smell of flowers. Only the smell of the ditch weeds, cow parley and such.

*The Last Gentlemen, page 48*

In *Merchant's Road*, John Power persuasively invites September to '...walk in the patio in the moonlight.'

That once there was a lily pond and a rustic seat ...and when you sat with the moon shining in your hair you were enveloped in the exhalations of the night-scented stock. Come, I'll show you. (Page 36)

This time September returns in distress, her dress torn, and her hair dishevelled. She addresses Paul: **Picture 6.30**.

Sept. : Look what he does to me. he is like an animal. This is your father.  
Paul : You didn't have to go.  
Sept. : You say this ! You say this ! You know what kind of a man he is ?  
Paul : You tell me.  
Sept. : He is himself and then he is not himself the next minute. Am I a pms to be pawed with pity or prevarication ?

*(Merchant's Road, Page 38)*

Pride, the hopelessness of their financial situation, coupled with the recognition by both men of their position and the fact that any help that is forthcoming will result in a loss of face publicly, a loss of prestige and their extravagant way of life, lead both men to contemplate suicide. This is reinforced by their understanding that the uncared for and ill-maintained family home is now on the verge of collapse.

Burke-Browne talks about his intention to September, **Picture 6.31**

### Picture 6.31

Browne : Yes. I tell you I am a strong swimmer. To-day I will just swim farther than I ever swam before. That's all.

Sept : Out into the sea.

Browne : Way out into the sea. The sea is a great cleanser. It scourges, it scrubs, it cleans. So, when you go, you can think of me ~~that~~ way, swimming, swimming, way out into the Atlantic. No opposition out there, September. No sisters, no decaying houses, no rats just the clean deep and scoured sand.

Sept. : And when you come back?

Browne : What then?

Sept. : It will be all the same again, sir, won't it, when you come back?

Browne : Then I would be foolish to come back, wouldn't I? Excuse me, September, I must go into the garden for a button hole. Somewhere in the jungle there, is a rose garden with ~~some~~ roses in it. Men expect to see me walking down the town ~~in the morning~~ with a ~~button~~ flower in my button hole. A sort of hall mark, a relic of old decency. ( He goes out the front door.)

The scene is somewhat similar in *Merchant's Road* but this time played out before his son, Paul, and Tom Wells, Power's brother-in law, **Picture 6.32** (Page 57)

Tom : But what are you going to do?

John : I'm going swimming.

Tom : Swimming?

John : That's right.

Crowe : For God's sake! Is this a time for going swimming?

John : For me it is. Paul. Would you get me the togs and towel from the kitchen. ( Paul is staring at him. ) Well? You wanted to help me too, didn't you? Now I make a simple request and you find it difficult.

Paul : All right, father. ( He goes into the kitchen. They watch him. )

John : What's wrong with going swimming? I have always been a noted swimmer. John Power and his rolled umbrella and his eternal swimming. I have always been one to swim even on Christmas Day. Isn't this true, Tom?

Tom : ( a bit testily ) Yes, yes, we all know you are a familiar figure on the prom, but this is hardly the time.

John : Why not. It is calming and soothing to the nerves. The soft silky feel of the water in September, with the iodine being loosed in it. Far away from people, all people. People are my enemies at this moment. Where better can one shake free of them than fighting the gentle waves of the bay?

Tom : For the love of God, John.

John : Ah, thank you, Paul. Now you have done your good deed. You have helped me. ( He takes the towel and the togs from Paul. ) I will leave you all here to talk about my failings. It should prove an endless source of conversation to all of you.

As John Power leaves he turns to the group saying 'I won't really be needing this' and he takes his white towel and throws it away from him.

Fascinated, they watch it sail through the air and fall on the carpet in their midst. Then they look at him again. He looks at each one of them, lastly at Paul. His eyes have a gleam on them, and there is a smile on his lips. Then he salutes them with his umbrella, turns and is gone. (Page 58)

Power does carry out his threat and the remaining action in the play devolves onto Paul. He becomes the 'man' of the house. Paul, realising he has nothing, decided to give all up and go with the tinkers.

**Picture 6.33** *Merchant's Road*, page 62

**Porick** : You really want to come with us ? Do you know what you are doing?

**Paul** : I do now. Do you like me, Porick ?

**Porick** : I can like you or not like you. Now I like you. I am sad for you and maybe that is why.

**Paul** : I can be a <sup>second</sup> ~~sendend~~ son for you. Is it good to have a second son.

**Porick** : A second son is better than a pinto pony, but a pony is less trouble. You can break him An.

Before leaving Paul decides as his final act to burn the house to the ground, 'I will burn it out of me ... then I will be happy.'

He gets newspapers, takes them apart and sets them on the carpet near the towel. He runs pages of them here and there. Then he goes and gets a candle and sets it in the centre, gets a match and carefully lights it. (Page 63)

September tells him 'It's not your house to burn. It belongs to other people'. But when leaving she says 'Do what you like. You are free.' Paul with some doubt wonders about this freedom and extinguishes the candle.

The final lines in *Merchant's Road* are between Paul and September. **Picture 6.34**

Picture 6.34

64

Paul : ( taking her hand) I am as free as Banjo's birds.

Sept. : Then we will get the road under us. ( and they go out together and the door closes softly after them. )

The ending of *The Last Gentleman* is much more credible. Burke-Browne talks more about a death by drowning as 'a beautiful solution' and realistically sees the alternative offered by Poric that he 'disappear' into the travelling community as '...instead of the clean sea, smoke and dirt and lice in the seams of my trousers' (Page 65).

Burke-Browne's intention is also to burn the house to the ground. He follows the ritual mentioned in *Merchants Road* and he is unmoved by the protests of Poric, Banjo and September. He lights the candle. It is Poric who shocks him to the reality of the reaction of the settled community to such an act.

Picture 6.35

Poric : You say you like us, Boss ?

Brow ne : That is true, Poric.

Poric : ( bitterly) Oh, no, Boss, it is not true. You know what will happen.

Brow ne : No.

Poric : They will hunt the country for us. They would never believe you would do a thing like this. But people like us. Ah, well, we are different. We were the last ones here with you. So we are the ones. Did you think of this?

(Page 67)

Burke-Browne is shocked. 'Don't say things like that. Just go! Leave me! I don't want to speak to you again.' To September he says, 'I will remember your youth, the curiosity in your eyes, your love for your father and your brother. And then I will do what I think best....' (Page 68)

The play ends with the following stage instruction.

They look at him. They look at one another and then they go out the door. They close it softly after them. He looks at the candle.... He cups the light of the candle with his hands and as the curtain falls he says: ‘Out, brief candle’ and blows it out, and still is sitting there looking at the smoking wick. (Page 68)

Comparing the plays left me with the feeling that *The Last Gentleman* was a more satisfying play than *Merchants Road*, even with its extra two characters. In the rewriting Macken seemed to feel that the original idea was too simple and complicated the story with the father and son conflict. He also expanded some of the exchanges without improving on the original. An example of this is in Act 3 where Burke-Browne and Paul are in conversation with Poric/ Porick about him remarrying. In both examples Poric is speaking about his dead wife.

<i>The Last Gentleman</i> , Act 3, page 52	<i>Merchants Road</i> , Act 3, page 50
Poric: Why try, Gaffer? Rich women like her are not repeated, like. We will meet again, afterwards. She had red hair, and a fiery temper. If I haven't a clean slate, I'd be afraid of a clout. (Grinning)	Porick: Why not? You know, Rich women like her are not repeated; like things turned out in a factory. We will meet again so we will. When we meet. I don't want to have to be explaining too many things to her, see. She had red hair, and a fiery temper. I'd be afraid of a clout. (Laughing reminiscently)

**Macken’s other works**

At the beginning of this chapter I acknowledged that there were other works by Walter Macken and that they would not be covered in any detail. These are identified here. Most of these were written and produced during his time at Taibhdhearc na Gaillimhe (1939-1948).

*Caithréim Sclábhaide*, written with Tomás Ó Máille, is a verse drama about the life of St. Patrick. Presented in seven tableaux, it was performed at the Taibhdhearc from 16-18 March 1941 (BUW Folder 77). A mixed entertainment called *Rúille Búille*, described as a pot-pourri, was performed from the 15-22 March 1942. *Muintir na hÉireann*, a meascán (mixed entertainment) that included a sketch in three scenes with the name title, (BUW Folder 15). *Claddagh Days*, a poetic drama, is unfinished. The first movement is in BUW Folder 104. Macken's *Son et Lumiere* was written for Dublin Corporation about 1962. I could find no record to show that it was used (BUW Folder 39). *Recall the Years* is fully accounted for in Chapter 5. Macken's musical, *God's Own Country*, with Peter Hart, about the life of Fr. McDyer of Glencolumbkille, was unfinished at the time of his death (Macken. 2009, 434).

Remaining is a short play in three scenes, *Erse in Eire*. This is a ten page sketch for five characters. It is a send-up of the civil service from the colonial days through the Irish language changes from the 1920s. We see 'The Department' becoming 'An Department', then with the introduction of An Caighdhean Oifigeamhail, it became 'An Roinn', finally becoming 'The Department' again with the return to bilingualism requiring civil servants to have their first names in Bearla and surnames in Erse and along the way is the change from An Cló Gaelach to An Cló Romhanach (BUW Folder 75).

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<sup>154</sup> O'Flaherty, Emily. *Home is the Hero? The Published Plays of Walter Macken*. MA Thesis, NUIG 2002 (4940)

<sup>155</sup> Macken, Walter. *I am Alone*. London: Pan Books Ltd., 1978, page 113.



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- <sup>167</sup> Macken, Walter. *Home is the Hero*. London: Macmillan and Co. Ltd. 1953
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- <sup>169</sup> Macken, Walter. *Twilight of a Warrior*. London: Macmillan and Co Ltd, 1956
- <sup>170</sup> Macken, Walter. *Look in the Looking Glass*. (National Library of Ireland, MS 29334)
- <sup>171</sup> [http://www.irishplayography.com/search/play.asp?play\\_id=1382](http://www.irishplayography.com/search/play.asp?play_id=1382)
- <sup>172</sup> *The Voices of Doolin*. My reading copy was provided by Fr. Walter Macken, Walter Macken elder son.
- <sup>173</sup> This letter was found in BUW Folder 68. The folder contains letters mainly about the Macken short stories.
- <sup>174</sup> O'Neill Eugene. *Anna Christie, The Emperor Jones, Desire under the Elms*. London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1960
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- <sup>176</sup> The Internet Movie Database: <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0068699/> for summary and full synopsis
- <sup>177</sup> Cólín D. Owen and Joan N. Radner, eds. *Irish Drama, 1900-1980*. Washington D.C: The Catholic University of America Press, 1990, page 350
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## Chapter 7

### **Walter Macken, his time, his performances, his plays and his critics.**

‘Sweet Inishfallen, fare thee well! Forever!’ <sup>179</sup>

The period *After the Irish Renaissance* (to cite Robert Hogan, 1968) was the start of Walter Macken’s working life. The opening lines in Hogan’s *Preface* reads: ‘This book is an informal critical account of Irish dramatic writing since about 1926 when Sean O’Casey cried with savagery and sadness “Inishfallen, Fare Thee Well”, and followed Shaw and Joyce and so many other Wild Geese into exile.’ <sup>180</sup>

This is a fitting point to start any examination of the times and theatre works of Walter Macken. O’Casey’s words, though referring to his own circumstances, were also applicable to the changing Dublin and Ireland he was leaving behind. The country had started to change and these changes would impact on the lives and aspirations of the whole people. They were to determine not only what people read and what they saw but also what they thought.

Hogan continues in his Preface to pose the question ‘What happened to the Irish Renaissance?’ (1968, viii). In offering some explanations he answers his own question with his belief ‘...that the Irish Renaissance never really stopped, but has continued, in poetry, fiction and particularly drama, to pour out a dazzling succession of brilliant works’ (ix). He acknowledges that no particular figure emerged to ‘don the mantle of Yeats...’ and, though he accepts that this time for Irish drama has been ‘lustily criticized by Irishmen as a barren period’, he prefers to see the time after 1926 as ‘an excitingly rich one.’ To support this assertion Hogan goes on to list almost every known playwright of any consequence between 1926 and the mid-1960s. Walter Macken is included in the list. Hogan continues by regretting the fact that most are little known outside Ireland, and not for lack of talent. ‘The reason for the obscurity of Irish playwriting has really to do with the economics of the principal commercial stages of the world, in London, Paris and New York.’ (x)

This may well be a reasonable explanation at the time Hogan's book was published in 1968 but changing socio-cultural conditions after 1926 critically influenced writers and their audiences. This can be seen more clearly as we step forward from this post 'renaissance' period.

The times up to 1926 were very different to the times afterwards. The preceding decade was a Victorian cum Edwardian Ireland. The country had survived a World War and, in Ireland, that War was added to by revolution, the War of Independence and a Civil War. The world of Yeats, Lady Gregory and the Irish Literary Theatre was not the Ireland that emerged after these turbulent years and saw the emergence of the Irish Free State. The social changes in the country were dramatic.

Terence Brown, in his excellent account on Irish social and cultural history from 1922-2002, documents the changes. He concludes his chapter on the period 1922-1932 <sup>181</sup> with the following paragraph (quoted in part):

.... There were the fiercely personal paintings that Jack Yeats executed throughout the 1920s as, in the face of public incomprehension, he brooded on the tragedy of the civil war; the defiantly speculative poems of his more renowned brother; the young men beginning to exploit the short story as a means of probing a society that dissatisfied them; MacLiammóir presenting European drama at the Gate Theatre and Irish language drama in Galway; and writers as different as the poet Austin Clarke and the novelist Francis Stuart, each beginning careers that were to take them to searching explorations of Irish life; all of whom gave hope that individual imaginative nerve had not atrophied in what must in general be reckoned a dispiriting decade from the social and cultural point of view....'

(2004, 125)

It would be unbalanced to consider only the political changes taking place and not to make some reference to the role the Catholic Church played during these years of

formation. J. H. Whyte in the *Church & State in Modern Ireland, 1923-1979* gives us a view of the consensus that existed in Irish society during the first two decades of the Free State <sup>182</sup>:

The years 1923-1937 reveal, so far as religious values are concerned, a remarkable consensus in Irish society. There was overwhelming agreement that traditional catholic values should be maintained, if necessary by legislation. There is no evidence that pressure from the hierarchy was needed to bring this about: it was spontaneous. The two major parties ... were as one in this.... The Catholic populace gave no hint of protest. The Protestant minority acquiesced. The only real opposition came from a coterie of literary men whose impact on public opinion was slight. (1980, 62)

By the end of the 1930s the 'Irish State appeared wholly committed to the maintenance of Catholic values' (61) though de Valera did oppose the church hardliners, who wanted the 'one true church' inserted as of right in Article 44 of his 1937 Constitution. <sup>183</sup>

The reading habits of the general public in Ireland are addressed in an interesting essay appearing in *Ireland in the 1930s* <sup>184</sup>, edited by Joost Augusteijn. The essay by Elizabeth Russell entitled *Holy crosses, guns and roses: themes in popular reading materials* draws heavily on *Eason's Monthly Bulletin of Trade News* for the period.

... but shortly after the foundation of the state this barely-formed society was not interested in high-brow literature or in weeklies condemned by county councils throughout the decade as 'vile and unhealthy'. Irish readers, en masse, were interested in sanitised magazines, wild west heroes, easy-to-complete puzzles and love everlasting.' (1999, 26)

In her conclusion she mentions that 'Eason's knew what the public wanted to read .... Crosses, guns and roses were the key elements – religion with a little adventure and escapism; all the more welcome when the setting was Irish.' Battles of words between

literary men and others with politicians or the church did not concern the readers who were ‘...not listening: they had escaped to a saloon bar in the wild west (decorated with religious icons), for action and romance.’ (28)

The early 1940s was dominated by the “The Emergency” (see Brown, Chapter 6, “*The Emergency.*” *A Watershed*) and the most obvious feature of post-war period, according to Whyte, was increasing ‘integralism’. He explains:

All sorts of forces were at work to make Ireland a more totally Catholic State than it had yet become: more totally committed to Catholic social teaching as then understood, more totally committed to Catholic concepts of moral law, more explicit in its recognition of the special position of the Catholic Church.

(1980, 158)

This was ‘not the line of development among most continental Catholics in the post-war period’ where the trend was away from integralism to ‘...one of bridge building towards those of different traditions.’ (159)

The position of the Irish Catholic Church to influence what plays were suitable for performance in the theatre is illustrated by the following two relatively minor incidents. Such incidents pass without receiving much attention but when the pressure to conform is applied so nakedly at this level it is an indication of the power exercised by the church at the time, the depth of their influence and their attention to detail.

The first incident is from the Abbey Theatre minute book and the second from the Taibhdhearc archive in NUIG.

(a) The Abbey minute book for the 5 May 1949 records in Ernest Blythe’s manager’s report a request from a Fr. Lavinus that the winner and runner-up in the All-Ireland Dramatic Festival play in the Abbey Theatre in June 1950 rather than in the Fr. Matthew Hall.

Blythe reported, 'Directors would find in giving him [Fr. Lavinus] the theatre... that it might turn out that some of the popular Abbey plays had been banned from the competition.'

At the time, *The Plough and the Stars* was not allowed to play in the Fr. Matthew Hall.

(b) This letter from the Taibhdhearc archive at NUIG <sup>185</sup> speaks for itself:

**Picture 7.1**

From the Bishop of  
Galway

MOUNT ST. MARY'S  
GALWAY

9th December, 1950.

Miss Mairin McAllister,  
Secretary,  
An Taibhdhearc,  
GALWAY.

Dear Madam,

I am instructed by His Lordship to acknowledge your letter of the 5th instant and to say that he regrets that he cannot accept your invitation to the production of "St. Joan" by Shaw, on the 15th instant. Much as His Lordship would like to honour the President of Ireland, he does not think that attendance at a Shaw play would be a suitable means or occasion for one in his position.

Yours faithfully,

*Michael Spelman*  
Diocesan Secretary.

This production of St. Joan (*San Siobhán*) was translated to Irish by Siobhán McKenna. It was directed by Ian-Priestly-Mitchell and played from the 13-17 December 1950.

The struggle between the Church, the State and the theatre continued throughout the 1950s to the well publicised and much written about *Rose Tattoo* affair in 1957 and the cancellation of the 1958 Theatre Festival (Hogan, 1968, 181; Brown, 2004, 217, Murray, 2004, 386 <sup>186</sup>).

1958 also saw the publication of the Whitaker Report on *Economic Development*. This Report is now accepted as a landmark in Irish economic history. It provided the impetus that slowly moved Ireland out of its deep economic post-war depression and laid the foundation for the modern Irish State.

For Walter Macken and, indeed, all the playwrights and writers of this period, these were the conditions they faced. Macken's early death in 1967 meant that he did not have the opportunity to benefit from the major changes that started to become evident from the early 1960s. His later plays show an awareness and understanding of what was happening. He moved away from the traditional style of play that received acceptance at the Abbey Theatre during the 1940s and 1950s into the broader based, more critical drama that started to emerge in the late 1950s. Hogan would like to think of the Irish Renaissance as continuing to, and beyond, the mid-1960 (x), the time of a new start for the Irish playwright. (Footnote 7.1)

In the **Introduction** (Page 11) I have given an outline of Macken's early life and education. He completed successfully his school Leaving Certificate in 1934 and this was the end to his formal education. Walter Macken was self-taught in matters of writing, plays and theatre. He is referred to by Bachler-Walter (1994) <sup>187</sup> in her thesis as an 'autodidact' and this is repeated by Feld-Nüßler (1995) <sup>188</sup> in her work.

His introduction to theatre is covered in **Chapter 1** and his only training must have been under the instruction of Frank Dermody, part-time up to 1934, and from 1935 until his departure from Taibhdhearc na Gaillimhe in January 1937.

It is difficult to establish with any certainty if Macken had a distinctive acting style. Dermody's own career at the Taibhdhearc started in 1928 and before he became the

**Footnote 7.1:** For a concise account of theatre in Ireland in this mid-century period I would recommend Christopher Murray's essay 'O'Casey's *The Drums of Father Ned* in Context'. This can be found in *A Century of Irish Drama* edited by Stephen Watt et al. <sup>189</sup> Readers may also be interested in Lionel Pilkington's *Theatre and the State in Twentieth-Century Ireland, Cultivating the People*, Chapter 6 'Irish theatre and modernization, 1948- 68'. <sup>190</sup>

actor/ manager at the Taibhdhearc in 1931 he received about one year instruction from Mac Liammóir and Edwards at the Gate Theatre in Dublin (Footnote 1.1).

Macken learned his stagecraft from Dermody, otherwise it was 'learning by doing' (Macken, 2009, 72). It was this experience he would have drawn upon when he became the actor/ manager at the Taibhdhearc in 1939. If there was to be an acting style at the Taibhdhearc it is likely to have been a Macken-Dermody style, an emphasis on realistic line delivery. None of the Taibhdhearc players I spoke to referred to an acting style by name, though they all did comment on their rehearsals with Macken (Appendix 2.15).

His time at the Abbey from 1948 to 1950 would have had a major influence on his performance standards. Blythe was not too impressed with his early performances (Page 96) attributing his faults to his time at the Taibhdhearc (Page 98). Macken's arrival at the Abbey coincided with Ria Mooney's time there and his performances improved steadily under her direction. Voice and poetic realism were understood at this time at the Abbey to be the constituent elements.

Walter Macken was well read but whether he was influenced by any of the established acting styles cannot be confirmed. In *Dreams on Paper*, Ultan Macken refers to a 'rough note' his father had written to himself before his trip to the USA in August 1954. This listed the names of people he would like to meet and among the names were, Lee Strasberg, Julian Compton and Clifford Odets but there is no evidence that this ever happened (2009, 313).

Walter Macken must have been greatly helped by his wife, Peggy Kenny, who, with her university education (Macken, 2009, 77), was an invaluable guide for him in his early career and was to fulfil a similar supportive role throughout his working life. She was the only person to read all his works before they were presented to his publisher or the Abbey Theatre.

Macken's first hand experience of life outside Ireland was confined to his two visits to the USA, occasional trips to London and the two years he worked in London for an insurance company from 1937 until 1939. That London experience was the basis for his novel, *I am Alone*, published in 1949. It was also the backdrop for his short play, *Flat to Let*, written about 1940. Apart from those experiences, his life experience was based in Ireland and in particular in Galway and Connemara.

It was to the people of Galway and Connemara that he turned for his inspiration for his plays, his novels and his other writings. Ultan Macken in *Dreams on Paper* quotes from an article found among his father's papers:

.... I believe that the people among whom I was born in my own home town were the people to write about. They weren't people who were well off. They had to struggle for their food, their clothes and their relaxation. I was interested in everything about them and me and where we lived.... (2009, 315)

On the same theme later in the article he refers to the indiscriminate censorship in place in Ireland at the time:

You are writing for your own people. What's going to happen if they stop your own people from reading you. Is your writing as they say indecent and/or obscene or is this in their own minds, or are they reading excerpts out of context like picking out the dirty bits from the Bible. (2009, 316) **Footnote 7.2**

**Footnote 7.2:** In 1926 the Minister of Home Affairs set up a Committee of Enquiry on evil literature. A Censorship bill was introduced in 1928. It was condemned by Yeats, Shaw, George Russell and others but passed into law. The first censorship board was established in 1930 (Keogh, 1994, 30 also 74). Three of Macken's books were banned; *Quench the Moon* (1948) *I am Alone* (1949) and *The Bogman* (1952).



His conviction about his audience continued throughout his life. During an interview for the *Evening Herald* in 1964 <sup>191</sup> he told Vincent Doyle, ‘A writer must learn to love and write for his own,’ and he went on to say, with resignation based on his experience, ‘I keep on writing about Ireland and the Irish and I want to tell you they are not a nation of book buyers.’

### **Macken the actor:**

The bulk of Macken’s acting career was divided between Galway and Dublin. He did perform in England and America and at various venues throughout Ireland but almost all his performance work was done at the Taibhdhearc and the Abbey Theatres.

To establish a view of his skills as an actor we must turn to the press and their reviewers, to comments from his fellow actors and to his performances in film.

His first years as an actor with the Taibhdhearc under the influence of Dermody showed sufficient promise for him to be employed by the theatre in 1935 (**Chapter 1**). The *Connacht Sentinel* review of his performance as St. Bernard in *The Marvellous Life of St. Bernard de Menthon* mentioned his ‘admirable restraint... a restraint which helped him from overstepping the bounds into rant. He maintained a good balance all through....’

Macken continued to play main parts in the Taibhdhearc plays through 1936 and on his final performance before leaving in 1937, in T. C. Murray’s *Sovereign Love*, *The Connacht Tribune* described him as having ‘innumerable successes’ and that he gave ‘a delightful reading’ of Donal Kearney.

A measure of his success and the esteem Dermody had for him is reflected in the outstanding reference he was given on leaving. The reference, signed by Dermody and written on behalf of the Taibhdhearc Directors, described Macken in Dermody’s opinion as ‘...the most outstanding actor (comedy or tragedy) in Ireland today not excluding the Abbey Theatre....’ (**Appendix 1.6**)

Accepting Dermody's written reference, I am satisfied that Walter Macken at this early stage in his theatre career was an actor with potential and that his appetite for the theatre marked him down for future success.

When he returned to the Taibhdhearc in 1939 it was under different circumstances and in a totally different role. He was now the actor/ manager, responsible for Taibhdhearc na Gaillimhe.

Reviews of the Taibhdhearc performances, mainly in the local Galway papers, have to be treated with caution. Galway, in the 40s', was a 'country' society and it must have been difficult for reviewers to be objective about its plays and performers, when you were likely to meet those involved on the main street in Galway every day of the week. Those involved taught in the schools, worked in the local businesses, were members of the defence forces or were attending the university. To overcome this difficulty and to establish the standard of Macken's acting during this period, we are fortunate to have non Galway based performances to consider.

The short Taibhdhearc season at the Gate theatre in 1940 was reported on by the national press (**Chapter 2**). Even accepting that the reviewers may have shown some sympathy to the task of performing in Irish the reviews were consistently positive. Macken was described as '...an actor of talent, whom it is a pleasure to hear and see' (*The Irish Times*). He continued his success with his performance as 'Captain Boyle' in *Juno and the Paycock* in Belfast in 1943. He took the Taibhdhearc to Dublin for a second time, this time to the Abbey Theatre, with his own play *Oighreacht na Mara* in 1945 and he was complimented for his '...fine acting qualities....'

Walter Macken wrote to Ernest Blythe in November 1947 and asked for work as an actor at the Abbey. He arrived at the Abbey Theatre for a six-month trial in January 1948. Blythe supported the move but had some reservations. Macken would be required to prove himself. Blythe had only seen him perform once and thought him 'quite good at character work.' (Abbey minute book, 20 November 1947) Blythe consulted Liam

O'Briain at NUIG (then UCG) about Macken and he said Macken was '...a really very good character actor and a very decent fellow.' (4 December 1947)

I believe that Macken's move to the Abbey gave his career as an actor a much needed boost. Blythe was aware of the difficulties he would face having spent so many years at the Taibhdhearc as a director, taking leading roles and being 'free from direction or interference.' The move placed Macken before a wider and more critical audience and exposed him to the Dublin critics. It also provided him with the opportunity to continue with his writing.

The English language plays in which Macken appeared while at the Abbey were almost all reviewed by the three Irish national daily papers while reviews of his Irish language performances are less than complete, not attracting the same press interest. Extracts from the reviews from the national papers for the period 1948 to 1950 are in **Appendix 3.1**.

His life in Dublin was structured around the Abbey and his home in Cabra. He attended his rehearsals and returned home to write. He was not drawn into whatever social scene revolved around the Abbey players or other writers and artists of the time (**Appendix 2.15**, page xii). He was not a drinker and did not frequent the Dublin pubs, literary or otherwise. Anthony Cronin paints a bleak picture of the Dublin pub scene frequented by artists and writers from 1948 in his book, *Dead as Doornails*.<sup>192</sup> Members of the Abbey Company would have been part of this culture. Sadly, the benefits of such associations which should have been energising, informing and thought-provoking carried a destructiveness that benefited few if any of the participants. Macken's life style did not include such excesses.

Macken was a fine actor and well regarded in the profession at the time. He came to national prominence with his performance as Bartley Dowe in Molloy's *King of Friday's Men* (see page 97) and it was to play this part in the Broadway production of the play that Macken left the Abbey in 1950.

I approached Tomás Mac Anna in October 2009 <sup>193</sup> about his memories from these times. He was a producer/ director at the Abbey when Macken arrived in 1948. Mac Anna was pleased with the new arrival and remembers Macken as an asset to the Company:

Ria Mooney, who was the senior director at that time, thought his arrival helped enormously – she had introduced some new members and he with his personality did help to blend them together.

According to Mac Anna, Macken got on ‘wonderfully well’ with the Company. He was very professional in his timekeeping and attitude and he was well liked by the Company and the Abbey audiences. He considered him to be an excellent actor, in Irish and English plays. He also mentioned as one of his pleasantest memories, Macken in pantomime. ‘He was an excellent singer and I welcomed his many contributions to the fun of the pantos.’

Ernest Blythe liked Macken as an actor. Macken came to the Abbey with the reputation of being a good character actor. Blythe’s reservation about his ability was soon put to rest with some fine performances with the Company. At times Blythe compared him to F. J. McCormick (*Mungo’s Mansion*, 1948 and *The Jailbird*, 1949). Blythe would not consider any other actor to play Bartley Dowd in *The King of Friday’s Men*. This was Macken’s ‘star part’ according to Tomas Mac Anna and described by Hugh Hunt as ‘his greatest success as an actor...’ (1979, 171)

Walter Macken was a successful Abbey actor. Being in the company of other actors and directors must have been a relief to him as well as having a positive effect on his performances. This was his first time away from his roots in the Taibhdhearc and now under the influence of Ria Mooney he was able to develop his acting skills and technique to reinforced his earlier more basic training.

The 1950s opened with sharply contrasting fortunes for Macken. He performed well in *The King of Friday’s Men* Broadway production though the production was a dismal failure. Kenneth Cox Lyman in his thesis on the critical reaction to Irish Drama on the New York stage <sup>194</sup> confirmed the difficulties faced by the production before opening

night (1960, page 115). The difficulties mentioned by Lyman were script changes, cast changes, two postponements and on opening night, considerable prompting. He also reported that Macken's playing was unanimously praised (**Footnote 7.3**). This did bring him to the attention of some Hollywood studios (**Picture 4.4**), but his desire at that time was to write and the Hollywood opportunity was passed.

The international success of his novel, *Rain on the Wind*, provided him with sufficient financial independence to allow him to become a full-time writer. Even with this independence he did from time to time appear in stage performances with mixed results. For example, Kenneth Tynan of the *Observer* described his Abelard in the 1951 play *Héloïse* by James Forsyth as invested 'with a soft Celtic guilt as soothing and as antiseptic as a bandage' (Page 122). By contrast his 1953 Old Mahon in the *Playboy* was described by *The Irish Press* 'as fine a piece of character acting as this actor has ever done' (Page 135).

Macken's commitment to the dual careers of writer and actor reached crisis point by 1955. This followed the great success of his play, *Home is the Hero*, performed at the Queen's Theatre by the Abbey Company in 1952 and the failure of the same play on Broadway with Macken playing the main part in 1954. Macken received good reviews for the pre-Broadway performances but a particularly damaging one from Vivian Mercier in *The Irish Times* where he described Macken as botching 'his own handiwork by a monotonous, unimaginative performance' (Page 144). This is echoed by Eric Bentley in his book, *What is Theatre?* There he describes the performance: '... Mr. Macken acts the part of the protagonist mercilessly, turning sullenly upstage when he might have been ogling the gallery (1957, 6). Lyman concludes '... that it [*Home is the Hero*] managed to survive its first few performances was in large partly due to Theatre Guild subscriptions and the comparatively modest cost of the production' (1960, 200) and confirms that 'the

**Footnote 7.3:** Lyman's study '...is primarily concerned with theatrical dramatic criticism as it exists .... and the critical reaction to Irish Drama on the New York stage'. He assembled a record of this critical reactions to Irish Drama from 1900-1958. He defines Irish Drama '...as plays written since the Irish literary revival by Irish born playwrights, where the scene is set in Ireland and contains a theme or themes reflective of Irish life and/ or Irish thought' (1960, 47). A copy of the Lyman thesis is available in St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra, Cregan Library.

play was almost unanimously condemned for its unbearable central character and lack of plot progression.

This production of *Home is the Hero* appears now to have been designed to fail. My first thought was that Macken just tried too hard and pushed his performance to an unreasonable outcome. Mercier touched on this very point when he mentioned Macken's (Page 144) 'obsession with strength...' Mercier thought the play worth-while and that a 'better-trained and more gifted actor' would have presented a more credible Paddo.

Walter Macken had a firm view on Paddo's personality. He saw him as a tragic figure bent on his own destruction and this was what he thought he brought to the part. Macken prepared a note on the characters in *Home is the Hero* for the American production. Remaining are just two pages from this note, pages 13 and 14. The note was handwritten by Macken in pencil and the fragment was found in BUW Folder 67. It is his description of Paddo and is reproduced in **Appendix 7.1**.

Unfortunately, Macken was to repeat this flawed interpretation of Paddo, very much in line with his own views of the character, in the film of the play in 1958.

Walter Macken gave up acting at the end of 1955 and he did not appear again on the Irish stage (Page 155). His only appearances were for television, films and in radio productions, mainly of his own work. He continued writing plays and novels.

He appeared in two full-length films. His performance as Paddo in *Home is the Hero* in 1958 was lauded in Ireland and when it opened in the USA was roundly condemned by the *New York Times* critic (Page 163). Having seen the film I agree that he gave a relentlessly monotonous performance. He presented a destructive and joyless Paddo. The film script did provide the back-stories to the play, such as the killing of Mr. Green, but failed in the setting and in the casting. Arthur Kennedy, as Willie, had an occasional limp and his accent was more Hollywood than Irish. In stark contrast Macken's performance as Warder Regan in *The Quare Fellow* was excellent, see page 171. His performance was liked by the critics and was one of the few good points mentioned by the reviewers of the

film. In my conversation with Patrick Laffan, one of his first remarks about Macken as an actor was to refer me to the film. He considered this film an excellent example of how good Macken was as an actor. Having seen the film I agree with him.

Macken's positive reputation did follow him for the next years. Hogan discussing Abbey acting wrote:

And certainly today there are fine actors in the company; but it is still true that many of the best recent actors leave. Cusack, McKenna, Macken, Marie Kean, and Ray McAnnally are all cases in point. .... (1968, 8)

Pat Laffan told me that he was not a big man yet his memory is of a big man. Macken had a presence in life and on the stage. Tomás Mac Anna remembered his as 'bringing to every performance that personality of his which filled the stage.'

## **Macken, the playwright**

In Chapter 6 I have provided a summary of Macken's complete works for the theatre from his first play, *Coral Reef*, written in the mid-1930s and ending with *Merchants Road*, completed in 1963.

Looking at these works and presenting them in approximately chronological order of writing we can see the progress Macken made in his writings through his working life. He moved away from the simpler and sensational stories of his early writings to a more sensitive and aware representation of what he saw around him. His later work tackled social issues and challenged obeisant thinking. Examples include poverty and homelessness in *Vacant Possession*, family violence in *Home is the Hero*, the distortion of the Republican ideals in *Twilight of a Warrior*, alcoholism and the family in *The Voices of Doolin* and the changing Ireland in *The Last Gentleman* and *Merchant's Road*. He also pointed up Irish hypocrisy, the attitudes to Irish history, to social problems, to religious beliefs and in particular our lack of charity and understanding and our

unforgiving attitudes to each other. He showed people, perceived as kind and respectable, as thoughtless, avaricious and self seeking. Examples are, the Captain in *Coral Reef*, Mungo in *Mungo's Mansion*, Mabbina and Bawnog in *Types and Shadows*, Dacey Adam and his sister, Gubby in *Twilight of a Warrior*, Stopper Collins in *Look in the Looking Glass*, Morgan Cumisky in *The Voices of Doolin* and John Power in *Merchants Road*.

With one clear exception all Macken's central characters are men and most are flawed 'heroes'. The exception is Mabbina in *Types and Shadows* and she is reduced by the end of the play to a traditional dependency role. The other independent woman but in a more traditional setting is Mary Jo in *Saint on a Sunday* and in the play she is contrasted with the malicious village shopkeeper, Maggie Minogue and her daughter, Minnie. McAndrews, writing about the women in Macken's novels, considers that he was sympathetic to women though confining them within their traditional roles <sup>195</sup>.

Overwriting was Walter Macken's great weakness. He overwrote everything. He complicated his plays at times to such a level that any reading of his better works shows the core of a good story or entertainment that needs to be plucked from his descriptions and actions repeated too many times. A case in point has to be the comparison between *An Cailín Aimsire Abú* and *An Fear ón Spidéal*. The former is a credible farce, slowed by repetition dialogue and a poor ending, while the latter is just an overdone comedy that does not work. The Abbey rejected both plays and was particularly scathing about *An Fear ón Spidéal*, submitted under the title *Rude Forefathers* (**Picture 6.11**). To realise the final English translation of *An Cailín Aimsire Abú*, Macken wrote three versions while for *An Fear ón Spidéal* there were five. This was the tentative and uncertain start to his career as a playwright.

My impression is that his confidence in his own abilities and his successes with the Irish plays at the Taibhdhearc made him unaware of this weakness in his writing. If he were to identify and overcome this fault at this early stage he needed supportive criticism which was not available at the Taibhdhearc and Macken's own satisfaction with his work provided him with a misleading comfort level. The fact that the plays were performed at



the Taibhdhearc should have shown the deficiencies in the works but with an eagerness for Irish language writing for the theatre, the author presenting his own work to small audiences, helpful criticism was either not available, or went unheard or unheeded. He did receive an early pointer to this writing fault in *The Irish Times* review of the Dublin production of *Oighreacht na Mara* in 1945 (Page 62). The reviewer wrote 'The author... piled too many tragedies into too few people and slipped rather easily into sentimentality and speechifying...' (Page 63)

A further case in point is with *Mungo's Mansion*. We now know that the original version had a 'miracle ending' and this was too much for Ernest Blythe. The play was cut by Blythe and Frank Dermody before its first production in 1946 and the final scene removed (Page 75).

After *Mungo's Mansion* was accepted by the Abbey Theatre Macken wrote to Macmillan & Company in late 1945 about publishing the play and during this correspondence mentioned that he had completed a book entitled *With Men of Blood, O God*. It was with this manuscript that Macken's special relationship with Macmillans started (Macken, 2009, 160). Macmillan's had the policy of publishing plays that had received a public performance. Their examination of book manuscripts was much more stringent. It was their core business and recognising Macken as a writer with potential, they set about establishing a remarkably frank and supportive relationship with him that was to last for many years. While complimenting him on *With Men of Blood, O God* Macmillan pointed out to him that it was too long and made suggestions for its revision. This positive Macmillan support was also commented on by the reviewer of *Dreams on Paper*, Patrick Lonergan, in *The Irish Times* on the 31 October 2009:

Macmillan knew that their decision to publish Macken's first novel, *Quench the Moon*, was an investment: they didn't expect the novel to be successful but believed they could develop the young author's talents over time. Dickson's ability [Macken's Macmillan contact] to do precisely that is impressive – we see

how he cajoles, offers constructive criticism and stern advice and, ultimately, shares Macken's joy when he becomes successful.

It was also in correspondence with Macmillan that the change of title came about and *With Men of Blood, O God* was published as *Quench the Moon*.

Unfortunately, the Macmillan advice that resulted in the successful novels was never applied by Macken to his work as a playwright and surprisingly he never seemed to make the connection. His ability to overwrite should have been even more obvious to him when Macmillan wrote in January 1950 that the original manuscript for *Rain on the Wind* of 'not less than 150,000 words... should be cut down by at least a third' (2009, 246). This revision resulted in *Rain on the Wind* becoming his best selling novel.

Macken was also faced by a difficulty outside his control. This concerned the Abbey theatre, their choice of play and their standards. To be a successful playwright in Ireland meant having your play on the Abbey stage. To achieve that required approval for you play from the Abbey readers. Hunt describes the changes in policy and the plays presented at the Abbey during 1932-1951 (1979, 169). He acknowledges the Abbey's record for new plays and that some were commercially successful but he concludes that the outcome by the end of the decade was falling standards, a loss of the better players and a Board policy not 'capable of restoring the Abbey to its former health' (175).

In my examination of the Abbey Theatre minute book I was struck by the number of plays rejected by the reading committee and/ or the Directors during Blythe's period as manager. In reading the minute book my focus was on Macken's time at the theatre and when he had plays under consideration by the Abbey. A small number of the plays submitted to the Abbey from the total number were set aside for discussion with the authors but the majority were returned apparently without comment. The numbers recorded seemed to me to be significant. Based on that observation, I counted the number for the year September 1960 to September 1961. Accepting that this is a raw figure and the possibility of double counting, the total from the 20 manager's reports is 148. If this

figure was reflected over the previous 20 years then up to 2500+ plays were rejected. I accept that this can only be at best an indicative figure but history has established some of the rejected plays that went on to successful full productions elsewhere. An example of a rejected play from this period is Tom Murphy's *The Iron Men* that had its first successful run as *A Whistle in the Dark* at the Theatre Royal, Stratford East, London, in 1961.

My point here is that there appeared to be no support system, no nurturing of the playwright, whether new or experienced. The pressure for the Abbey was successful runs to near full houses to cover their costs, especially in the years at the Queen's Theatre. The difficulty to achieve this is illustrated with the seventeen-week run of *Home is the Hero* in 1952. It was seen by an estimated 92,000 people and only showed a profit when the government subsidy was included in the equation (Page 127).

Macken as a playwright was on his own as were all the other playwrights of the period. But Macken did have the resolute pointer from Macmillan about his overwriting and his facility to over complicate the story and this was missed by him as a playwright.

As with Macken the actor, we have to decide who we should turn to for a view on the quality of his plays. The newspaper critics writing on the Macken plays provide contemporary accounts. They are the people who saw the plays and what they wrote, whatever their bias, or inexperience, was based on what they saw. They were also aware of the audience response. At times they were at odds with the audience and when this happened, more often than not, they say so. I refer the reader to page 162 and **Appendix 4.11** for the reviews of his performed plays.

Most writers on the theatre do so after the event. They provide useful analysis on plays performed and make helpful points about the story-line, characterisation, entertainment value, etc. Their views are often drawn from the 'page' not the performance. The Irish stage during the 1940s and 1950s appears to me to have been a very crowded place and, perhaps for that reason, not many writers give us their views on the Macken plays. Hogan remains the earliest source, describing five of the plays (1968, 65-70). Later writers

though identifying aspects of the work that appeal to them or perceived weaknesses with the writing, have confined their comments to a smaller number of the plays.

Some of the Macken plays neatly fall into a pattern, others less so and groupings of convenience have been used for this retrospective look at the works.

**1. In the first group, the early comedies, are the two collections of plays, *An Cailin Aimsir Abu*, *Lucy Callaghan's Father*, *Salute the Servant* with *An Fear ón Spidéal*, *Ring for Langford-Jones*, *Rude Forefathers*, *Pairt Thaidg* and *The Man from Spiddal*.**

Little has been written about these plays and my conclusion is that only *An Cailin Aimsire Abú* and its English translation *Salute the Servant* deserve attention. *An Cailin Aimsire Abú* has shown some resilience having its last performance at the Taibhdhearc in May 1982. A revision of the play would greatly improve it and it is still worth playing to modern-day audiences (Footnote 6.2). The revision would be for length, eliminating the repetitious writing and modifying the ending.

*The Connacht Tribune* <sup>196</sup> reported on the various performances of *An Cailin Aimsire Abú*. In 1943 it was described as ‘...cleverly constructed and had many good scenes which hold the audience until the final surprise...’ On the 1946 revival the reviewer referred back to the play’s early success and described it as ‘...a fast moving comedy...’ remarking that ‘a bigger-than-usual first night audience was in itself a tribute to the play.’ The report on the 1982 production also included a description of the play. No such attention was paid to *An Fear ón Spidéal*.

**2. The Galway plays form a cohesive second group. Starting with *Oighreacht na Mara* and continuing with *Mungo's Mansion*, *Vacant Possession* and *Home is the Hero*.**

*Oighreacht na Mara* enjoyed almost complete anonymity, being written in Irish. The report in *The Connacht Tribune* <sup>197</sup> after its 'premiere' in the Taibhdhearc in 1944 described the play as dealing with the 'lives of the Claddagh fishermen and the survival of the fishing tradition despite the revolt of the sons of the fishermen against the sea.' The play did receive critical comments in *The Irish Times* (Pages 61 and 335) that exposed flaws in the writing.

Macken's first play to receive national attention was *Mungo's Mansion* in 1946. Macken was not pleased with the Abbey production and Dermody's direction (Macken, 2009, 190). This does not surprise me. It gave *The Irish Independent* reviewer the impression that poverty in Buttermilk Lane, Galway, is somehow less squalid than in Marrowbone Lane, Dublin. *The Irish Press* questioned the 'bright and cheery setting.' That both papers felt it necessary to make such comments reflects badly on Dermody and is all the more puzzling considering that he had worked in the Taibhdhearc in the 1930s, (Page 72). *Mungo's Mansion* may not be a great play (Page 265) but the Abbey production did it a disservice. It was this production of *Mungo's Mansion* that gave rise to the comparison of Macken's work with O'Casey, a comparison that did not please O'Casey (Page 151).

Even as produced the play did not please some of the local Galway grandees who felt it emphasised too much '...Galway as a town of tenements and condemned houses....' This resulted in the 'Author's Note' <sup>198</sup> in the published edition of his next play, *Vacant Possession*.

In Macken's three Galway plays written in English he presents the lives of ordinary working people. Mungo King, the disabled docker, and his control over his family becomes Gunner Maloney, a disabled carter, now an alcoholic, whose drinking has resulted in the destitution of his family. Finally, Paddo in *Home is the Hero*, who rules

his family initially with a mixture of bravado and strength and finally degenerates to a vicious bully. These Macken's heroes are all flawed. Mungo finally decided to leave Buttermilk Lane for the good of his children's health. It is with Gunner's death that the opportunity arises for Chicken, Gunner's son, in *Vacant Possession* to takeover the carting business and to provide an adequate living for himself and his mother, Maggie. Paddo attempts to control his family by force. This results in him leaving the family home, defeated by his now adult children.

*Vacant Possession* never received a professional production. It is a fine play and also a fine example of the casual attitude taken by the Abbey to new work. The play was rejected on the grounds that the characters and the language were too similar to *Mungo's Mansion*. Rejections on such grounds when the plays are so different reflect negatively on the Abbey reading committee, on Ernest Blythe and the Abbey Board ability to identify plays of worth (Pages 77, 275, 337).

*Mungo's Mansion*, Hogan wrote, despite its length 'is an amusing tensely gripping play' (1968, 67). Blythe was happy that the play did 'marvellously good business during the first fortnight' (Page 75) and somewhat begrudgingly reported to the Abbey Board '...we escaped making a loss' (Page 76). Hogan liked *Vacant Possession* with its racier dialogue and 'the characterisation larger than life' (68).

Professor Heinz Kosok in *Plays and Playwrights from Ireland in International Perspective*<sup>199</sup> takes Macken and Louis D'Alton (1900-1951) as his subjects for his chapter 'Two Mid-Century Playwrights' (Footnote 7.4). He describes Macken as '...a successful dramatist and, throughout his life, a versatile man of the theatre' (1995, 222).

**Footnote 7.4:** Professor Heinz Kosok, Bergische Universität Wuppertal, is the person credited with the purchase of the Macken family papers in 1977 (Page 5). The papers are in the University Library archive. Annegret Feld-Nüßler (Page 244) completed her thesis 'Das Dramatische Werk Walter Mackens' in Wuppertal in 1995 under Professor Kosok's supervision.

Kosok considers that in his early plays

Macken did for the slums of Galway what O'Casey had done, on a larger scale and with deeper substratum of universal significance, for the slums of Dublin. Macken views the lower-class population of Galway with a combination of understanding, compassion, and humour strongly reminiscent of O'Casey. (223)

He thought *Mungo's Mansion* '... memorable for the situation it depicts rather than for the action that takes place in it.' He criticised *Vacant Possession*, writing that it '...lacks the focus of *Mungo's Mansion*' due to the 'sensational incidents' which are 'not well integrated into the plot.' The 'sensational incidents' referred to are those surrounding Gabbler Blake and Wee-wee Brady.

On this Hogan remarks that the effect on the main story '...is a bit dissipated by... this minor plot' but still sees the story as '...fine theatre...' (1968, 67)

*Home is the Hero* opened in 1952 during a newspaper strike so we are without the benefit of reviews. It was a remarkable success and was not without controversy. Letters written to the newspapers in October made clear that some people objected to the play '...because of its dethronement and debasement of the true upstanding, cultural and religious character of the Irish people (Page 130). One even suggested that the play's success was due to the absence of the critics (Page 131).

The play was described by Blythe as 'no masterpiece'. Hogan described it as 'a curiously cold, almost ill-tempered play... an adroit example of the best Abbey realism.' (1968, 68)

Kosok thought *Home is the Hero* Macken's 'most successful and possibly his best play.'

... much less optimistic than most of Macken's writings because it exposes not only the surface bickerings between people who are one at heart but also the basic conflict between irreconcilable characters. It raises serious problems about the

reeducation of criminals and, indeed, the educability of human beings. It is much more sombre in tone than Macken's other works....At the same time, it is skillfully constructed, and it makes up for its lack of exuberance by its concentration on a serious theme. (1995, 225) (Footnote 7.5)

We have already mentioned the Broadway production of *Home is the Hero* when discussing Macken the actor, (Pages 333 and 144). On the play itself Eric Bentley thought Macken '...so austere indifferent to present Broadway mores that he could only surmount the obstacle he places in his own path by writing an undeniably great play' (1957, 5). Also, he was not impressed with the direction and the acting.

*Home is the Hero* seemed to me to be very badly directed....One of the actors, playing the cripple, seemed to see the cameras approaching his face every time he smiled; and he showed surprising facility in dropping the character he was playing as if he had been switched to another TV program.

(1957, 6)

Others to comment on Macken's work include Micheál Ó hAodha. In his book, *Theatre in Ireland*<sup>200</sup> he wrote that during the 1940s '...the National Theatre produced several notable plays by M. J. Molloy, Bryan McMahon, Louis D'Alton and Walter Macken, but, while no masterpieces emerged, things were not going at all badly up to the time of the disastrous Abbey fire in 1951.' (1974, 135)

**Footnote 7.5:** Here I have to wonder about the difficulties that arise from cross-cultural reading of the works of Irish playwrights. To write, as Kosok, did in 1995 that the play '...exposes not only the surface bickerings between people who are one at heart ...' and to seriously mention '... the reeducation of criminals and, indeed, the educability of human beings...' in the context of the Ireland of the early 1950s is surprising. This is also a difficulty faced by Bachler-Walter<sup>201</sup>. She comments on the Macken 'Author's Note' in *Vacant Possession* '... if the description of the environment deviates slightly from reality this was done for dramatic effect' (1994, 49). On the three English-language Galway plays, she wrote: 'In all three plays this material poverty is due to the loss of the respective families chief income – that of the father...' (49). She further commented that '... the lack of space and privacy make many Macken characters impatient and aggressive. ...They are quite often not able to listen and to sort out their troubles in constructive conversation' (51). This is today's thinking and is without reference to the living conditions, the attitudes and the social norms of the time. When *Home is the Hero* was played in 1952 the sentence for murder was death. The last execution for murder took place in Ireland in 1954. If we accept the Bentley quote about 'great art' then '...it has to be thoroughly local, it has to bear the signature of a people and a way of life' (1957, 19).



Ó hAodha further wrote that ‘.... Walter Macken’s *Home is the Hero* fulfilled the promise that he showed in his earlier play, *Mungo’s Mansion*.’

Robert Hogan continued his interest in Macken in his other publications.

In an earlier book, *7 Irish Plays, 1946-1964*<sup>202</sup>, published in 1967, he noted in the ‘Introduction’ that: ‘It seems more important to note that the postwar Abbey, even under Mr. Blythe, has developed at least five first-rate talents ...’ The first-rate talents being referred to are Molloy, Macken, MacMahon, Byrne and O’Donovan.

These five men, appearing in little more than a decade, have each written at least two plays that will bear comparison with all but the best work of Synge, Fitzmaurice, and O’Casey himself. Indeed, it might be fairly said that the Abbey in the sixty-five years of its distinguished existence could hardly have boasted, at any one time, of another five men of equal excellence. (1967, 14)

A Macken play was not one of the seven discussed and perhaps to make amends, Hogan went on to describe Macken as one of the better realistic actors in the country, mentioning the ‘excellent notices’ he received for his New York appearances.

In *Since O’Casey and other Essays on Irish Drama*<sup>203</sup> in 1983 Hogan wrote:

The famous O’Caseyan mingling of comedy and tragedy was something that he had no patent on. A dozen geniuses and several hundred hacks had done it before, and his great impact was simply that he did it so memorably that he shocked everybody. In his early plays, Walter Macken seemed trying for a Galwegian equivalent of *Juno’s* comedy and tragedy, but wound up closer to farce and melodrama. It was only later that Macken went more his own way that he wrote his best. (1983, 94)

Later in the same volume he drew a comparison between the characters from other writings.

Friel's next real achievement in this kind of character drawing is Commandant Frank Butler of *Living Quarters*, a strong simple and not very articulate man who cannot finally cope with the inevitable failures of living. For the theatre, he is an unusual conception. With him, we are light years away from Joxer Daly. Perhaps Shakespeare tried such a character in Coriolanus; in the Irish drama, perhaps Walter Macken approached it in the father of *Home is the Hero* and J. B. Keane approached it in the father of *The Year of the Hiker*. But both Macken and Keane squelched sympathy for their characters, while Friel, with no theatrical simplifications or cajoling fakes, invites it. (1983, 130)

The 'squelched sympathy' point was earlier made by Bentley (1957, 5)

**3. The third group is linked by theme. The plays are *Types and Shadows*, *Twilight of a Warrior*, *The Voices of Doolin*, *The Last Gentleman* and *Merchants Road*.**

Though *Home is the Hero* was written in 1952, Macken had started examining a new subject area for his plays towards the end of the 1940s. These were his plays with a historical background, taking into account the changes that were occurring in Ireland. The first of these plays *Types and Shadows* is set in the turbulent years from 1900 to 1920. It traces the chaos, confusion and destruction leading to the fall of the old order and the emergence of the new State. The central character is an estate owner, a woman. This is Macken's only play where the dominant character is a woman. By the end of the play her life is destroyed and we see the beginnings of the new heroes, the freedom fighter, and in their wake, the stay at home 'Gombeen man' later to appear as Stopper Collins, the local politician and shopkeeper in *Look in the Looking Glass*.

*Types and Shadows* was followed by *Twilight of a Warrior* in 1955, a play liked by the critics but not by the audiences. By the mid-1950s the freedom fighter is the respectable

business man and disillusioned politician, Dacey Adam. Now he wins his battles within his family and in business. The ideals and hopes he had when fighting in the War of Independence have not been realised and the country is now in near ruin. We see the harshness and lack of Christian values of conservative religion in Gubby; Dacey's sister, the unacceptable past represented by his brother Affy, a World-War-1 hero, and the hopelessness of the present in Dacey, his control, and also in his dysfunctional marriage. The future is represented by Abel Martin who has arrived to ask his permission to marry his daughter, Elva. In Abel, and his like, rests the future. He is a countryman, a man of intelligence who has travelled and now has an appreciation of home. He is untainted by the past. The struggle between the Abel and Dacey is engaging and occupies most of the play. The play is also noteworthy for the fact that there is none of the usual Macken violence, just a struggle of wits between two very different personalities.

*The Voices of Doolin* continues the business connection and presents the challenge for control between the sensitive, artistic, doll-maker, Doolin, and the emerging commercial Ireland represented by Morgan Cumisky, the efficiency expert. Doolin, now a reformed drunk, struggles with his 'voices', in the face of family opposition to him retaining control of his doll-making company. In Doolin we see sensitivity and understanding in opposition to a harsh commercial reality. Doolin is excellently drawn and believes that the beauty and individuality of his product is important to his customers.

I believe it is with this play that Macken makes his break into the modern Irish play era. The period covered by Hogan as *After the Irish Renaissance* has now past. This is confirmed by Macken's next plays, *The Last Gentleman* (1960) and *Merchant's Road* (1963). Essentially the same play, they deal with two central characters with different backgrounds but suffering the same fate. The 'Gentleman' represents the last of the landlord class, those that survived the times that made Dacey Adam a 'hero' while the 'Merchant' a survivor from the protectionist period, has lost out to the likes of Morgan Cumisky from *The Voices of Doolin*. Both men either ignored or have not noticed the changing times. They now face extinction with the rise of the commercially focused post protectionist entrepreneur and businessman. Their status and way of life is represented by

their crumbling houses and already crumbled lives. Help is available but on unacceptable terms and they are reduced, one to suicide and the other to exile. Their ways of life have turned full circle and even the 'tinkers', the extreme of Irish society, who offer some comfort and understanding, appear to be freer.

Patrick Laffan <sup>204</sup>, the former Abbey player told me about his visit to Macken in his home in Oughterard about 1962. He was one of the young Abbey players in the Spiddal Gaeltacht, to refresh their Irish language skills. Laffan and the other players were invited by Macken to read *Merchant's Road*. He remembers the enjoyment they had reading the play especially the 'tinker' characters, Poric, Banjo and September.

This may have encouraged Macken to submit the play to the Abbey in February 1963. The play was 'returned' by the Abbey in June that year (Page 172). In his interview with *Tatler* on the 1 July 1965 Macken mentioned the earlier play, *The Last Gentleman*, as completed with Cyril Cusack in mind for the Burke-Browne part (**Appendix 5.1**).

Hogan held Walter Macken in high regard. This comes to the surface in his letter to Macken in July 1965 when his appointment as an Abbey Director became public (**Appendix 5.14**). In his Introduction to *7 Irish Plays, 1946-1964*, he mentions *Twilight of a Warrior* as 'one of the strongest dramatic comments upon recent Irish political history'. While on *Doolin* he wrote:

His recent *Voices of Doolin* is a complex and agonized portrait of a drunkard that reconfirms one's impression that Macken has been moving steadily away from broad theatricality toward an ever-deepening delineation of character. He is a vigorous man, probably still at the height of his powers, and anything else that he writes should be worth close attention. (1967, 14-15)

In his Chapter, 'A Factual Index,' in *Since O'Casey and other Essays*, he reinforced his opinion on *The Voices of Doolin*.

When he died, Walter Macken still seemed at the height of his very vigorous powers. Although in his last years his interest had really turned away from drama to fiction, he was for a period before his death the artistic director of the Abbey. Also, his last produced play, *The Voices of Doolin*, seemed in its character drawing much subtler stuff than the theatricalities of his early work. Before his death, I was scheduled to see *Doolin* into print, but was not able to – a misfortune I still regret, as the piece seemed to me one of his best. (1983, 158)

Kosok saw *Twilight of a Warrior* as a conflict between generations represented by the struggle between Dacey Adam and Abel Martin. Both are described as excellent parts with ‘Adam, as well as a magnificent acting part, is a fascinating, complex character whose past life is revealed in skillfully constructed scenes.’

He goes on to criticise Macken

Yet Macken did not fully develop the public aspect of the play, his country’s difficult task in assimilating both her recent history, the heritage of the fight for independence, and the heroes surviving from that time. Even less did he develop that universal element he himself had suggested in the choice of the names Adam and Abel. (1995, 226)

Hogan speculates on the name, Dacey Adam, Macken choose for the protagonist (1968, 69) while Kosok seems to want some development around the names, Adam and Abel. Dacey asks of Abel no more than he would ask of ‘a good dutiful son’ (page 296). The conflict between Dacey and Abel does represent the struggle between the new and the old Ireland and goes beyond a mere conflict between the generations. Developing the ‘universal elements’ of their names is perhaps best left to the audience?

For Pilkington *Twilight of a Warrior*, ‘... deals with the problematic legacy of Ireland’s celebrated republican past (201, 147) and is an example of the change in the Abbey’s repertoire of plays tending to ‘...reflect a widening gulf between traditional nationalist

views associated with the foundation of the state and a contemporary world for whom such views are no longer relevant'. (159).

Tomás Mac Anna in his letter dated 22 October 2009 described Macken as a very effective playwright, 'his pieces always well constructed, his characters always well realised.' On his plays he wrote:

I would take *Home is the Hero* first although *Mungo's Mansion* had excellent local atmosphere and a really fine principal character. *Home is the Hero* was a totally different effort in background. [It was] very successful in its Queens run of many weeks but *Look in the Looking Glass* I wouldn't rate as typically Macken. There was I think an element of pretension which was not the expected thing for Macken, a most realistic writer of plays and novels. I saw *Voices of Doolin* at the Gaiety. Again Macken surprised us by writing what is essentially a fantasy, his strength lay in realism. *Doolin*, I found disappointing. *Twilight of a Warrior* was to my mind a fine play and quite a surprise from Macken.

[Authors note: Mac Anna wrote *Twilight of a Warrior* as the title in line two of this excerpt. I am satisfied he meant to write *Home is the Hero* and have substituted this title.]

**4. The remaining four full-length plays are the three comedies, *The Boys Come Home*, *Look in the Looking Glass* and *Saint on a Sunday* and a drama, with a religious theme, *The Boola Boy*.**

*The Boys Come Home* is more a throw-back to the style of his earlier plays and in my opinion is not as good as *Cailín Aimsire Abu* (Salute the Servant). The idea is good. The first act is entertaining but what follows is noisy and uninteresting (Page 267).

Both *Look in the Looking Glass*, and *Saint on a Sunday* are plays that have some purpose. *Look in the Looking Glass* received its professional production by the Abbey in 1958. With the writing changes and the title change Blythe thought the play would be a success, '...more effective on the stage than on the typed page...' and with a well suited cast

(Page 159). It was considered to be more pleasing than *Twilight of a Warrior*, with characters an audience would like (Page 160). The play failed and the explanation reversed all that had been previously said. The play performed less well on stage than it read and the casting was wrong. Blythe also added the poor weather condition and the competition from the Gaiety to his explanation for the failure. Blythe was disappointed with the outcome. The reviews were not bad (**Appendix 4.11**) and even *The Irish Times* reviewer covered himself when writing ‘.... The audience, apart from myself, appeared to enjoy it without reservation.’ Circumstantial evidence<sup>205</sup> indicated that the script changes made by the Abbey contributed to the failure.

*Look in the Looking Glass* is not a great play but it deserved better treatment. The production by the Citizen’s Theatre, Glasgow, described as a ‘...rustic, gossamer-light comedy’ was nearer the mark (Page 167). But then the Civic Theatre was not under the same financial pressures as the Abbey at the Queen’s. This disappointing failure was added to by Macken refusing the Macmillan offer to publish the play (Page 161).

I enjoyed reading *Saint on a Sunday*. This was Macken having fun at the expense of the American film industry and Irish hypocrisy. He exposes the low moral standards and hypocrisy of the industry and also the resentful envy and greed of Irish people towards each other and their fawning hypocrisy in turn towards Americans, represented in the play by the film company personnel. The film company people are supposedly in Ireland to audition women for the name part in a film about the life of St. Bernadette.

*The Boola Boy* is a poor play. It is an unsuccessful attempt to recreate the ‘miracle’ sequence from his novel, *Sunset on the Window Panes*. The novel provides space to weave the various characters together to form a credible story but the transfer to the stage missing the background stories leaves too many unanswered questions. Though available as a typed manuscript and copies, the play does not appear to have been taken beyond this stage of preparation.

**5. The fifth group contains all the short plays: *Coral Reef*, *Flat to Let*, *Uncle Peter*, *The Instigator*, written for television, *Bhi Mac Agam Trait*, and *The Whistling Woman*.**

When I found the letter from Hilton Edwards mentioning *The Instigator* for television (Page 308), I was satisfied that it would suit that medium. The two versions of *Coral Reef* were interesting from a historical view point only, as a possible early example of Macken's work. I liked *Flat to Let*. It is a simple story with a shocking ending. A third party reader thought the ending unrealistic but I felt the pressure of impending war and a marriage under financial threat could drive a worried and anxious individual to despair. *Bhi Mac Agam Trait*, written for Litheas Órga Chonradh na Gaeilge received its one performance on the 17 October 1943 at the Taibhdhearc. It is a simple, undemanding piece. *The Whistling Woman* was a surprise find. It is unlike any of his other works and it may owe its writing to Macken's own wonder about the role of the artist, the critic and the performer. The play is set in a frame provided by two working class women looking into the world of the artist and playwright.

### **Macken the Theatre Manager:**

Walter Macken was not a manager. The position with Taibhdhearc na Gaillimhe was more of a 'missionary' nature. The players were mainly amateur and carried with them a desire and enthusiasm to provide a living Irish language theatre that accommodated both Irish and foreign plays (in translation) as a means to support the use and growth of the Irish language. The Taibhdhearc also encouraged and provided an outlet for Irish language playwrights. Ó hAodha thought the Taibhdhearc 'more successful as a training ground for players and producers such as Siobhán McKenna, Walter Macken, Frank Dermody and others than a source of original drama in Irish' (1974, 139)

The Galway job embraced all aspects of the theatre and would have been a good learning experience but it did not provide sufficient management skill and knowledge for the position at the Abbey Theatre in 1965/ 66.



My conversation with the three Taibhdhearc players (Page 82 and **Appendix 2.15**) provides a good understanding of the organisation and work involved for the Taibhdhearc manager. There is no doubting Macken's contribution to the Taibhdhearc's development and growth in the 1940s. His enthusiasm, organisational skills, his play selection and his own writings in Irish for the theatre attest to that.

I can understand why he accepted the position on the Abbey Board in 1965. He had the encouragement and support of the players (**Footnote 7.6**). It was a discrete and well defined activity. It had a public profile and placed him at the core of a national institution. It also placed him in a position of some influence in the theatre and within Irish theatre circles.

He should never have accepted the positions of artistic adviser and assistant manager. His proposal for the positions by Dr. Wilmot was unusual. Dr. Wilmot was the other government nominee on the Abbey Board. It also appeared to cause Mr. O Farachain some discomfort (200). Managing a resident Company requires more than knowledge of the theatre. The players were by now organised and with the restructuring that had taken place arising from the Andrews Report (page 189) required careful and skilful management. During the spring of 1966 a number of players were 'let go' and this had a further unsettling effect on the Company.

Walter Macken should have remained a Board member. Attempting to work three jobs was not possible and this proved to be the case. Within four months of his resignation the three positions were filled by three experienced practitioners.

**Footnote 7.6:** This was confirmed by Patrick Laffan when we spoke on the 6 April 2010. He supports the quotation in Vincent Dowling book, *Astride the Moon*, (page 190). Patrick Laffan also mentioned that the players saw very little of Macken. We know from Mac Anna that Macken would meet the play directors, Dermody and Mac Anna, to inform them of his plans and generally to consult with them. Mac Anna also mentioned that 'in the main the company was pleased with the appointment and looked forward to a welcome co-operation with someone who was both playwright and player.

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- <sup>185</sup> NUIG: The James Hardiman Library Special Collection, Taibhdhearc na Gaillimhe papers, T1/B/1171
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- <sup>188</sup> Feld-Nüßler, Annegret. 'Das Dramatische Werk Walter Mackens'. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, Europäischer Verlag der Wissenschaften, 1995
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- <sup>190</sup> Pilkington, Lionel. *Theatre and the State in Twentieth-Century Ireland, Cultivating the People*. London: Routledge, 2001. Chapter 6, page 159
- <sup>191</sup> Doyle, Vincent. 'The writer his work and his readers'. *Evening Herald*, 23 November 1964
- <sup>192</sup> Cronin, Anthony. *Dead as Doornails*. Dublin: The Lilliput Press., 1999. (First published by Calder and Brown and The Dolmen Press in association with The Talbot Press in 1979)
- <sup>193</sup> I contacted Tomás Mac Anna in early October 2009. He was pleased to be able to help me from his knowledge of Macken's periods with the Abbey in 1948-1950 and 1965-1966. He asked that I send my questions to him by post. His reply was dated 22 October provided detailed answers. I have his permission to quote from his response in my work.
- <sup>194</sup> Lynam, Kenneth Cox. *Critical Reaction to Irish Drama on the New York Stage 1900-1958*. PhD Thesis, University of Wisconsin, 1960, Chapter III: 'Failures on Broadway, 1912-1955'.
- <sup>195</sup> McAndrews, Linda. 'The Representation of Women in the Novels of Walter Macken'. M.Phil Thesis, National University of Ireland, Galway (formerly UCG), 1994, page 99
- <sup>196</sup> The reports can be found in *The Connacht Tribune* on 18 September 1943, page 3; 28 September, page 5 and 5 October 1946, page 5; 23 April 1982, page 5 and 7 May, page 2.
- <sup>197</sup> *The Connacht Tribune*, 24 June 1944, page 5.
- <sup>198</sup> Macken, Walter. *Vacant Possession*. London: Macmillan & Co. Ltd., 1948, page v.

- <sup>199</sup> Kosok, Heinz. *Plays and Playwrights from Ireland in International Perspective*, Trier: WVT Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 1995
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- <sup>203</sup> Hogan, Robert. 'Since O'Casey' and other Essays on Irish Drama (Irish Literary Studies; 15). Colin Smythe, Gerrards Cross, Bucks, 1983
- <sup>204</sup> Mairéad Delaney, the Archivist with the Abbey Theatre contacted Patrick Laffan on my behalf and he was agreeable to meet and to discuss his memories of Walter Macken in the early 1960s and during his time as Abbey Director in 1965/ 66. Our meeting was on the 6 April 2010. Laffan's memories included this visit to the Macken home in the summer 1962.
- <sup>205</sup> The script for this play is in the Abbey Theatre collection in the National Library of Ireland, MS 29334. The editing is clearly marked. Originally Act 1 ended on page 19 with Ceolaun about to tell some villagers about Mico's play, *The Pookey*. This revelation was moved to the end of Act 1. As a result Act 2 starts on page 24 with Mico's arrival. *The Irish Times* reviewer description of Act 2 as '...short, skimpy and disjointed' (Page 299) is a comment on this Abbey change. The marked script changes are extensive. There is no way of knowing if all of them were implemented.

## Conclusion

The objective for this work, as outlined in page one, has been achieved. The purpose was to provide a complete account of the professional theatre work of the playwright, actor and manager, Walter Macken. The work provides the necessary detail on his theatre activities for us to conclude that Macken was a talented actor and a good playwright. He was a man that tried to balance his careers as a writer of novels, plays and short-stories with his theatre work; in the end his acting suffered. He did write successfully for the theatre and a number of his plays deserve further attention. He clearly over-reached himself when accepting the executive positions at the Abbey Theatre. He did not have the necessary management skills and whatever benefit he could have drawn from his Taibhdhearc experience was outdated and insufficient. He should have been satisfied with his Board position.

I believe that Macken's known plays have been harshly judged. When coupled with the additional plays uncovered in this work, I am of the opinion that some deserve attention. With some revision, I would recommend to an enthusiast for plays unseen, plays new but not modern, the following full-length and short plays.

*An Cailin Aimsir Abu and/ or Salute the Servant*  
*Vacant Possession*  
*Types and Shadows*  
*The Last Gentleman*  
*Saint on a Sunday*  
*Flat to Let*  
*The Whistling Woman*

Of the performed Macken plays my preferences are for *Twilight of a Warrior*, with a revised ending, and a re-write for *The Voices of Doolin*. Any revision to *Look in the Looking Glass* should combine Acts 1 and 2 into a single Act. A re-write could incorporate the Abbey script changes and should edit out the violence. The ending of *Home is the Hero* could be shortened as suggested by the Swedish reviewer, page 184, and any director should avoid the mistakes made by Macken when he played Paddo.

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MS. 38,060/1: O'Casey papers  
National Library of Ireland: Main Library, call no. Ir 820 p 93, *Recall the Years* programme

NATIONAL University of Ireland, Galway (NUIG): The James Hardiman Library Special Collection, Taibhdhearc na Gaillimhe papers

## Websites

INTERNET Broadway Database <http://www.ibdb.com/production.asp?ID=2458>  
IRISH Playography: [http://www.irishplayography.com/search/play.asp?play\\_id=1382](http://www.irishplayography.com/search/play.asp?play_id=1382)  
NEW YORK TIMES website: <http://movies2.nytimes.com/mem/movies/review.html?>  
MACKEN, Walter: <http://www.waltermacken.com>  
TAIBHDHEARC na Gaillimhe: <http://www.antaibhdhearc.com/>  
AUSTRALIA: Maitland Repertory Company, [www.maitlandrepertory.com/old/](http://www.maitlandrepertory.com/old/)  
National Institute of Dramatic Art (NIDA), <http://www.nida.edu.au/>  
State Library of Western Australia, Perth, <http://www.slwa.wa.gov.au/>  
National Library of Australia, <http://www.nla.gov.au/>  
National Film and Sound Archive, <http://www.nfsa.gov.au/>  
BELGIUM: Vlaams Theater Instituut, [www.vti.be](http://www.vti.be)  
ENGLAND: Liverpool Records Office, [www.liverpool.gov.uk/archives](http://www.liverpool.gov.uk/archives)  
GERMANY: Theaterwissenschaftliche Sammlung, [www.schloss-wahn.de](http://www.schloss-wahn.de)  
Hamburger Kammerspiele, [www.hamburger-kammerspiele.de](http://www.hamburger-kammerspiele.de)



Die Zeit: <http://www.zeit.de/1955/20/Buehne-und-Studio-in-Konkurrenz>  
 IRELAND: RTE, [www.rte.ie/libraries/](http://www.rte.ie/libraries/)  
 NORWAY: The National Library in Oslo, <http://www.nb.no/>  
 Det Norske Teatret, <http://www.detnorsketeatret.no/>  
 SCOTLAND: Scottish Theatre Archive, <http://special.lib.gla.ac.uk/sta/>  
 The Citizens Theatre, <http://www.citz.co.uk>  
 SWEDEN: Riksteatern, <http://www.riksteatern.se/templates/Sida.aspx?id=1896>  
 Sveriges Teatermuseum (the Theatre Museum of Sweden)  
<http://www.teatermuseet.se/en>  
 THE NETHERLANDS: Netherlands Theatre Institute (TIN), [www.theaterinstituut.nl](http://www.theaterinstituut.nl)

## TV and Radio Broadcasts

1953: *Home is the Hero*, broadcast by Radio Éireann, 20 September at 20.30 with Macken playing Paddo.  
 1958: *Home is the Hero*, broadcast by BBC, 27 July at 20.00  
 1961: *The Voices of Doolin*, broadcast by Radio Éireann, 19 March at 20.30. Repeat broadcast 29 October 1961 at 15.30  
 1974: *Feach* programme. 'Galway's Gaelic Theatre', broadcast by Radio Telefís Éireann (RTE) on 18 March at 21.30, director John Williams. *Feach* producer was Sean O Mórdha and the film director Joe Mulholland.  
 1974: *All the World's a Stage*, documentary about Siobhan McKenna and her time in Galway and Belfast. The programme was broadcast on 4 October by RTÉ at 22.50. Producer: George Howard.  
 1988: *Cursai* programme. Interview with Peggy Macken, broadcast by Radio Telefís Éireann, 5 April  
 2003: *An Taibhdhearc*, first transmission by TG4 on 6 December. Produced by Hawkeye Films, the documentary was to celebrate the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Taibhdhearc na Gaillimhe.  
 2010: *Bowman*: Sunday at 08.30. RTÉ Radio 1, Part 1 was broadcast on 4 July and Part 2 on 11 July 2010. This is a retrospective on the career of Walter Macken and is of interest because of the interview materials drawn from the RTÉ archive including the voices of Walter Macken and Peggy Macken (Kenny).

## Films

*Home is the Hero*. Dir. Fielder Cook. Performers: Walter Macken, Arthur Kennedy and the Abbey players. Emmet Dalton Productions, 1958  
*The Quare Fellow*. Dir. Arthur Dreifuss. Performer: Walter Macken, Patrick McGoohan, Sylvia Syms. Anthony Havelock-Allan Productions, 1962  
*High Plains Drifter*. Dir. Clint Eastwood. Performer: Clint Eastwood. Producer: Robery Daley, 1973 [The Internet Movie Database: <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0068699/> for summary and full synopsis]

## Published Plays

*Mungo's Mansion*. London: Macmillan and Co. Ltd. 1946  
*Vacant Possession*. London: Macmillan and Co. Ltd. 1948  
*Oighreacht na Mara*. Galway: D. W. Kenny, The Bookshop, no date  
*An Fear Ón Spidéal*. An Chéad Chló, Dublin: Oifig an tSoláthair, 1952  
*An Cailín Aimsire Abú*. An Chéad Chló, Dublin: Oifig an tSoláthair, 1953  
*Home is the Hero*. London: Macmillan and Co. Ltd. 1953  
*Twilight of a Warrior*. London: Macmillan and Co. Ltd. 1956

## Unpublished and Performed Plays

*Look in the LookingGlass*, 1958  
*The Voices of Doolin*, 1960

## Unpublished and Unperformed Plays (see Appendix 6.1 for further details)

*An Sceir Criobheil*  
*The Coral Reef*  
*Flat to Let*  
*Uncle Peter*  
*Lucy Callaghan's Father*  
*Ring for Langford Jones*  
*Rude Forefathers*  
*Bhí Mac Agam Tráth*: Performed 1943  
*Salute the Servant*: see Footnote 6.2  
*The Man from Spiddal*  
*Pairt Thaidg*  
*Claddagh Days*  
*The Boys Come Home*  
*Gaels in the Gantry*  
*Three Days in the Gantry*  
*The Whistling Woman*  
*Types and Shadows*  
*The Boola Boy*  
*Saint on a Sunday*  
*The Last Gentleman*  
*The Instigator*  
*Merchants Road*

## Other writings for the Theatre [See Page 319 and Appendix 6.1]

*Caithréim Sclábhaide*: written with Tomás Ó Máille, 1941, (verse drama)  
*Rúille Búille*: 1942, (pot-pourri)  
*Muintir na hÉireann*: 1947, (mixed entertainment)

*Claddagh Days*: poetic drama, (unfinished)  
*Son et Lumiere*: Unperformed  
*Recall the Years*: 1966, see **Chapter 5**  
*God's Own Country*: with Peter Hart, (unfinished musical)  
*Erse in Eire* (sketch)

### **Periodical Publications** (Selection)

'Where Stands the Gaelic Drama?', *Irish Workers' Weekly*, November 1945  
'Are You Doing Anything Tonight? Why not Try the Theatre?,' *The Irish Press*, 24 January 1948 [Thesis, page 92]  
'What it Takes to Make an Actress,' *The Irish Press*, 31 January 1948 [Thesis, page 92]  
'Spotlight on the Chorus,' *The Irish Press*, 14 February 1948  
'Palatial Cinemas: Backstreet Theatre,' *The Irish Press*, 6 March 1948  
'Author vs. Actor,' *New York Times*, 12 September 1954 [**Appendix 4.5**]  
'Macken on Mayo,' *Ireland of the Welcomes*, February 1955  
'A Book at Twenty,' *The Irish Press*, 30 November 1962  
'You Asked for It', *Writer*, Boston: July 1963

### **An afterthought**

Walter Macken was born and lived almost all his life in or near Galway city. With a few exceptions all his writing was done there. He wrote for and about the people of Galway and Connemara. He was a nationally and internationally acclaimed writer of novels and plays during the 1950s and into the 1960s. Yet, he has disappeared almost completely from sight and his works forgotten.

This is more understandable in the national and international sense but not in the local sense. Galway lays claim to a cultural life more than most. Their festivals embrace all aspects of literature, including theatre, yet they ignore Macken. It is fine to remember a famous Galwegian with a plaque or two, a bench on Nimmo's Pier or when naming a block of flats or a road but to leave the writer's plays unplayed, and his books unread is a great shame. Leaving aside any prejudice that may exist against his work, commercially, it makes no sense. It is at least the loss of a marketing opportunity.

Galway prides itself on its progressive outlook in matters of industry and commerce, culture and the arts. Galway invites artists from all over the world to participate in its numerous festivals but has no place for one of its own. Macken's work is sufficiently varied to merit inclusion in the Arts Festival. Or is theatre in Galway so immediate that only the present or what's foreign counts?

This unravelling of the Macken archive in Germany and the identifying of Macken's full output for the theatre should spark an interest to correct this omission and provide to the people of Galway and summer visitors, entertainment that shows pride in a native son who from a simple beginning drove himself to a standard of excellence not achieved by many other native Galwegians.

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# **Walter Macken (1915-1967) – Playwright, Actor and Theatre Manager**

## **Part 2**

**J. E. Reid B.Sc., M.A**

### **Appendices**

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**Background, Sources and Introduction**

**Appendices 0.1-0.6**

## Appendix 0.1

### Summary list of the Macken papers in the Wuppertal library

**Werkmanuskripte:** Tss., z. T. auch Druckfahnen (jew. einige hs. korrigiert) aller veröffentl. Werke; Tss., einige wenige Mss u. Entwürfe (teilw. korrigiert) bisher unveröffentl. Werke: „*The Coral Reef*“ (Dr., um 1930), „*Flat to Let*“ (Dr., um 1939), „*Pairt Thaidgh*“ (Dr., irisches Gälisch, um 1939), „*The Boys Come Home*“ (Dr., um 1940), „*Uncle Peter*“ (Dr., um 1941), „*Caithreim Sclabhaidhe*“ (Dr., irisches Gälisch, 1941), „*The Whistling Woman*“ (Dr., um 1942), „*Salute the Servant*“ (Dr., 1943), „*Bhí Mac Agam Tráth*“ (Dr., irisches Gälisch, 1943), „*Oighreacht Na Mara*“ (Dr., irisches Gälisch, 1944), „*The Man from Spidda*“ (Dr., 1945), „*An Fear Ón Spidéa*“ (Dr., gälische Fassung von „*The Man from Spidda*“, 1945), „*Claddagh Day*“ (Dr., um 1947), „*Types and Shadows*“ (Dr., 1949), „*The Instigator*“ (Dr., um 1950), „*The Boola Boy*“ (Dr., um 1954), „*Look in the Looking Glass*“ (Dr., UA 1958), „*The Voices of Doolin*“ (Dr., UA 1960), „*Saint on a Sunday*“ (Dr., 1961), „*Dublin Castle*“ (Dr., 1962), „*Merchant's Road*“ (Dr., 1963), „*Recall the Years*“ (Dr., 1966), „*God's own Country*“ (Dr., 1967), „Cockle and Mustard. The True Tale of Walter Macken“ (autobiograph. Rom. undat.), „And Then No More“ (Rom. undat.), „*Gaels in the Gantry*“ (Dr., undat.)<sup>1</sup>, „*Lucy Callaghan's Father*“ (Dr., undat.)<sup>2</sup>, „*Ring for Langford*“ (Dr., undat.)<sup>3</sup>, „*Rude Forefathers*“ (Dr., undat.)<sup>4</sup>, „*The Last Gentleman*“ (Dr., undat.)<sup>5</sup>; masch. Scripte zu Filmfassungen: *Home is the Hero*, *The Scorching Wind*; Tss. und zu einem geringen Teil Mss. unveröffentl. Kurzgeschichten u. Gedichte;

**Korrespondenzen:** Briefe an W. Macken u.a. von Sean O'Casey, Michael Molloy, Robert Hogan, Ernest Blythe, Tomás Mac Anna, Frank Dermody, Briefe von W. Mackens russischer Übersetzerin M. Marinova (insgesamt ca. 50 Briefe, Teil eines Briefwechsels), nur sehr wenige Briefe von W. Macken, Korrespondenz im Zusammenhang m.

**Verlagsveröffentlichungen u. Theaterarbeit,** Leserbriefe, persönl. Korrespondenz;

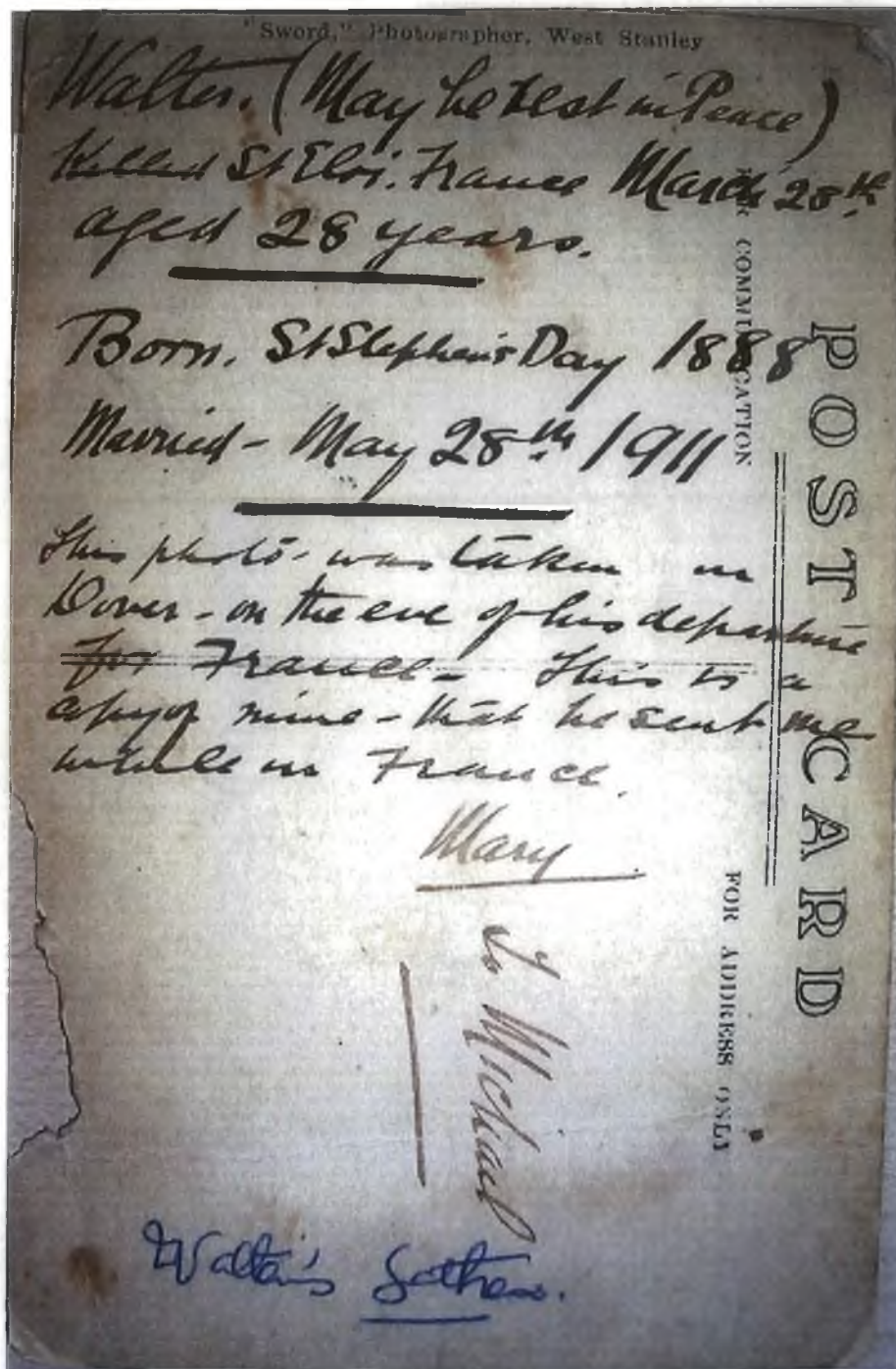
**Lebensdokumente:** Verlagsverträge, Theaterdokumente (Programmhefte, Besetzungslisten etc.), Haushaltsbücher, Kontoauszüge; Sammlung: Rezensionen, Zeitungsausschnitte über eigene Werke u. Theateraufführungen;

Nachlassbibliothek vorhanden.

The play titles and other theatre pieces are in *italics* and **highlighted**.

## Appendix 0.2

This is a copy of the post-card side of the photograph of Walter Stephen Macken reproduced on page 8. It confirms his dates of birth, marriage and death. The original is in the Macken archive at the **Bergische Universität Wuppertal**, folder 17.



### Appendix 0.3

Death of Walter Stephen Macken as reported in the Galway papers

*Galway Pilot & Vindicator, 15 April 1916*

#### **Another Galwayman Killed in Action.**

News reached Galway on Tuesday that Private Macken, of the Royal Fusiliers (the London Irish), was killed in action in France on the 28th ult. The deceased, who was a carpenter by trade, was about 26 years of age, and had for many years acted as secretary to the Carpenters' Society. He was a prominent member of the Augustinian Hall, and took part in most, if not all, of the dramatic performances given there before he went to the front. He was a fine comic, and a very good actor. The dramatic troupe will sustain a very serious loss in his death. He was a sober, steady man, very intelligent, and of excellent character. He leaves a widow and three children to mourn his early demise — May he rest in peace.

The second report in the *Galway Express* is of extremely poor quality. The copy is on microfilm and it is just readable. For ease of reading I have copied the report.

Under the banner headline 'Local War Items,' the *Galway Express* reports the death of Walter Stephen Macken on the 15 April 1916.

It is feared that another Galwayman has paid the supreme sacrifice on the Battlefield in France- Private Walter Macken, 7<sup>th</sup> City of London Fusiliers. An army Chaplain has written to Mrs. Macken, who resides at Henry Street, stating that her husband has fallen, but the War Office up to the present has been unable to furnish definitive information. Pte. Macken, who has two brothers still serving, joined the colours less than a year ago, going to France about Xmas and it was only a fortnight ago that he went into the trenches. He was one of the most popular young men in Galway and was possessed of a kindly, genial temperament which won him a host of friends. In local amateur dramatic circles he was unrivalled, and his appearances (generally in the most difficult role) in productions generally at St. Augustine's Hall are still mentioned with eulogism of his histrionic abilities. Fr. Crotty had very high and favourable opinions. The brave soldier's death, if authenticated, will be all the more regretted because he leaves a young wife and three children to mourn his loss. Pte. Macken is one of the eight out of a membership of 30 of the local branch of the Carpenters' Union who rallied to the colours, and four of the eight have already figured in the casualty lists.



Appendix 0.4  
School Leaving Certificate of Walter Macken, 1934

IRISH FREE STATE.

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION  
(SECONDARY EDUCATION BRANCH).

HONOURS LEAVING CERTIFICATE.

This Certificate was awarded to  
*Walter Macken* (Exam. No. *4831*)  
who passed the Leaving Certificate Examination with Honours in  
*1934* having passed with Honours in the following subjects  
*English (Full Course) History and Geography*  
and passed in the following subjects *Irish (Full Course)* and  
*Latin*

SEÓSAMH Ó NEILL,  
Secretary

SAORSTAT GIBHANN  
An Boinn Oideachais  
(Bunannse an Meadon-Oideachais)  
Ard-Teistiméireacht Onóra.  
Gromad an Teistiméireacht seo ar

*Walter Macken*  
(Dard Uimhir *4831*) do éuaib féin Sgrúdaicín  
Ard-Teistiméireachta imbhlaidiun *1934*... dá díol Onóra a  
ndeanna. sé. sa Sgrúdaicín féin óile, agus na h-ádhaim  
seo go sonntaíadac *Beala (Lan. Lúrsa)* *Scann*  
*agus Lúrsa Lúrsa*

D'óirig lea. ms na h-ádhaim seo *Jacóidga (Lan. Lúrsa)* *agus Lúrsa Lúrsa*

*Seósamh Ó'Neill*  
Rúnaide.

**SAORSTÁT ÉIREANN**  
(Irish Free State)

**AN ROINN OIDEACHAIS**  
(DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION)

**BRAINSE AN MHEÁN-OIDEACHAIS**  
(SECONDARY EDUCATION BRANCH)

**MEÁN-TEISTIMÉIREACHT**  
(INTERMEDIATE CERTIFICATE)

Bronnadh an teistiméireacht seo ar

This Certificate was awarded to

*Walter Macken*

DÁRBH UIMHIR (Exam. No.) *1763*

A FUAIR PAS I SCRÚDÚCHÁN NA  
MEÁN-TEISTIMÉIREACHTA I MBLIAIN  
1932 DE BHÁIR NA MARCANNA  
ATÁ AR CHUÍ AN LEATHAÁIGH  
SEO DO GHNÓTHÍ.

WHO PASSED THE INTERMEDIATE  
CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION IN  
1932 HAVING OBTAINED THE  
MARKS SET OUT ON THE BACK  
HEREOF.

SGH. *4/11*

*Seosamh Ó Néill*  
RÚNAÍ (Secretary).



# MARCAINNA A GHNÓTÉIGH SEALBHTHÓIR NA TEISTIMÉIREACHTA SEO

(MARKS OBTAINED BY THE HOLDER OF THIS CERTIFICATE)

AODHAN AGUS MARCAINNA TOSLAÍNA (Subject and Maximum Marks)				MARCAINNA A GHNÓTÉIGHTEAR (Marks obtained)
Gaeilg (Irish)	...	...	400	168
Béarla (English)	...	...	400	172
Griega (Greek)	...	...	400	
Laiden (Latin)	...	...	400	
Fraincis (French)	...	...	300	
Gearmáinis (German)	...	...	300	
Stair agus Tíreolaíocht :- (History and Geography)	...	...	400	
Stair (History)	...	...	250	110
Tíreolaíocht (Geography)	...	e. 150		72
Matamaitic (Mathematics) :-	...	...	600	
Uimhiríocht (Arithmetic)	...	...	200	92
Matamaitic (Mathematics) I.	...	...	200	96
Matamaitic (Mathematics) II.	...	...	200	82
Eolaíocht (Science)	...	...	300	
Eolaíocht Tíghis (Domestic Science)	...	...	300	
Céil (Music)	...	...	300	
Cársa Tráchtála (Commerce)	...	...	300	
Sióinéireacht (Manual Instruction)	...	...	200	
Tarraisceireacht (Drawing)	...	...	150	

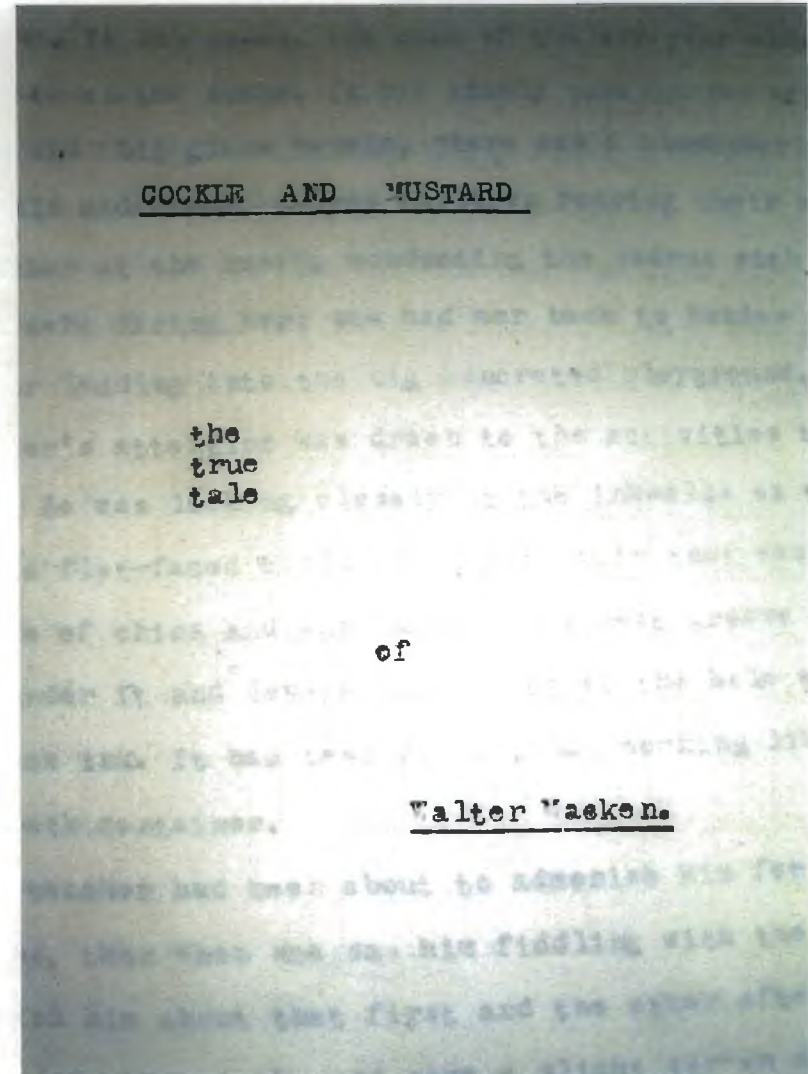
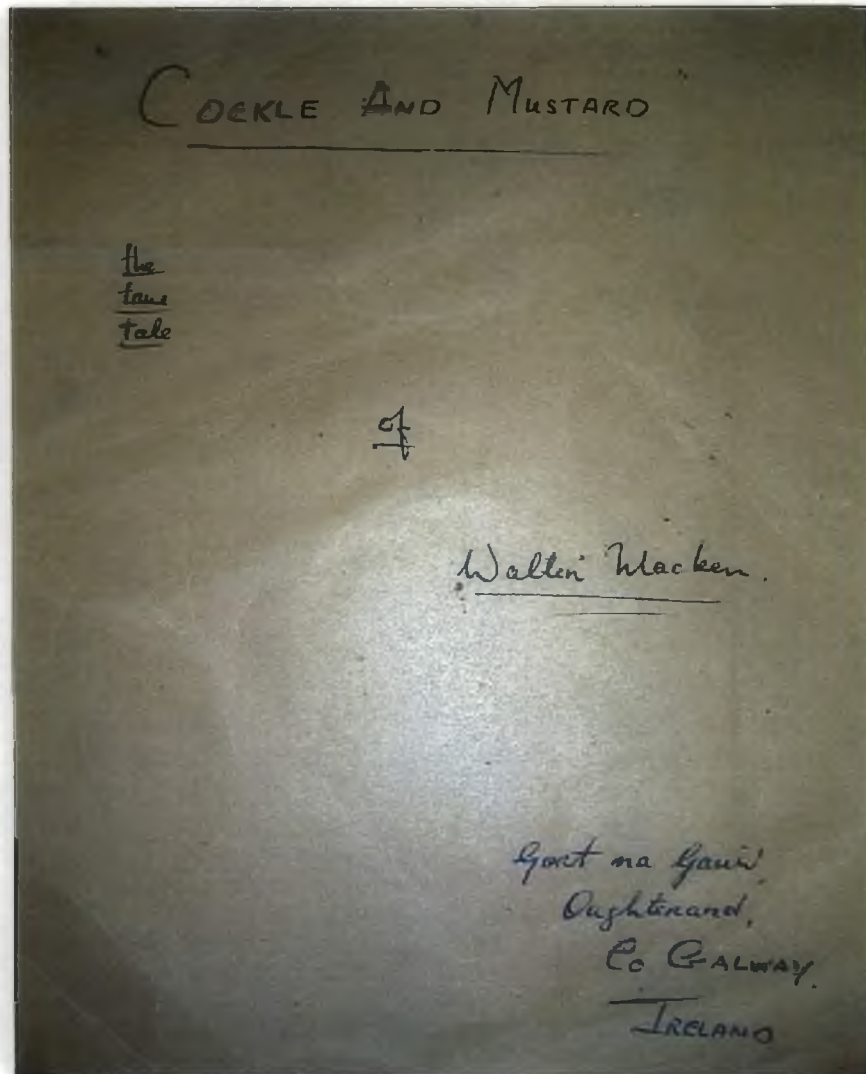
Is gáth 40% i gcóir Pas agus 60% i gcóir Ondracha i n-son adhbhar ar leith  
(The standard for a Pass in an individual subject is 40% and for Honours 60%).

Ní innítear na marcainna i gceist adhbhair go míthuairisc an t-áiríocháir  
níos ísle ná 20% ann  
(Marks are not shown in the case of a subject in which the candidate obtained less than 20 %)



## Appendix 0.5

Manuscript folder cover and cover sheet for *Cockles and Mustard*. (RHS, manuscript cover sheet)



## Appendix 0.6

This is a list of some of the newspapers that carried an account, an appreciation or tribute to Walter Macken after his death on the 22 April 1967.

Copies of most of cuttings can be found in BUW Folder 20.

Newspaper	Date
<i>Boston Globe</i>	27/04/1967
<i>The Connacht Tribune</i>	28/04/67
<i>The Connacht Tribune</i>	05/05/1967
<i>The Connacht Sentinel</i>	25/04/1967
<i>Evening Herald</i>	22/04/1967
<i>Evening Press</i>	22/04/1967
<i>Evening Press</i>	28/04/1967
<i>Irish Women's Journal</i>	June 1967
<i>New York Times</i>	23/04/1967
<i>The People</i>	23/04/1967
<i>The Irish Independent</i>	24/04/1067
<i>The Irish Press</i>	28/04/1967
<i>The Irish Times</i>	24/04/1967
<i>The Sunday Independent</i>	23/04/1967
<i>The Sunday Press</i>	23/04/1967
<i>The Sunday Press</i>	30/04/1967
<i>The Sunday Times</i>	No date, likely 23 or 30 April 1967

# **Chapter 1: At Taibhdhearc na Gaillimhe, 1932-1937**

## **Appendices 1.1-1.6**

## Appendix 1.1:

*Cockle and Mustard*, Chapter 15, pages 111 to 116 (BUW Folder 46)

### Chapter 15.

" Oh, young mister Wacken ! " the lady called after me.

We were idling on O'Brien's Bridge at the time. I was back at the Bish. It took a bit of doing but I got over it. Besides there was a new secondary school and it made a difference. You could make out you were a completely new boy instead of having deserted the colours for a year to wear a new colour. We were due into school at twenty to two. We nearly always got back to the Bridge around twenty-five past one and sat there until the last half minute. We would talk about important things and whistle after the girls passing by and if they turned to look we wouldn't be looking. Another one was to call out " Here ! " when a good looking girl passed. She would turn her head sure that you were calling and she would blush becomingly when nobody seemed to be taking any notice of her. Wico was a dab at this " Here " stuff.

We were on our way down when she called after me.

I turned. I just knew her to see. She was a tall lady with a cultured voice, that is a voice that is not too impregnated with the Galway accent. She was a nice lady, what they called a real Galwegian, meaning she herself hadn't come in the Oramore road like a lot of bustling newcomers and that her people before her had been Galway people.

" Yes, ma-am, " I said.

" Would you like to act ? " she asked.

" I don't know, " I said.

" Your father was a good actor, " she said.

" Where would I act ? " I asked.

" Down in the Gaelic Theatre, " she said. " Go down and see them down there. I'll tell them you will call. I told them you would be good. "

I remembered she had been in a grown up play the time I had done the lady in the small play and forgot about keeping my knees together.

" All right, " I said. " I'll call. "

" Don't forget, " she said.

I said I wouldn't forget, and I had to run like hell to be in time for school. Everyone always got sleepy in school after lunch. It was the sort of buzz time when your head became heavy and your limbs didn't seem to belong to



~~you and you~~ you and you had to hide huge yawns behind your hand so that a teacher before he gave you a slap with the cane could say sweetly, "I hope we are not boring you, Mister Macken." I remarked that that was twice in one day I had been called Mister.

I liked to act. As soon as I put a foot on a stage I got a sort of surge. But I didn't know if I was that keen. It was a pastime, I supposed. But then this Gaelic Theatre people did all their plays in Irish. I didn't think that I was very hot at Irish. It was taught as a subject then. It was a language like Latin or English. It was our native tongue long ago we knew and there was a lot of Irish spoken in the markets on Saturday by the people who came in the from sea direction, from back Cois Fhairrge, Barra and Furbo and Spiddal and all the way back along the wild coast. It wasn't terribly popular with the people, because they maintained that the Government were trying to force it down their backs. Everyone in the Civil Service and public jobs were getting a certain period to acquire a knowledge of it and if they didn't acquire it after that they were turfed out. All the schools had to teach it and in the lower classes they were now beginning to teach everything through it. We had no great regard for it, but then we had no great regard for anything we were being taught, just to get it over and be done with it. The only part of Irish we liked at the moment were the stories in the book "Jimín naíre Thaidhg" because they made us laugh, and we all said wasn't it a pity it wasn't written in English. Most boys belonged to an Organisation called "An Fainne" which was a little silver or gold ring you wore in the lapel of your coat to show that you were an Irish speaker and you weren't supposed to talk anything else. But that was ridiculous because there was an examination for the fainne. The man said, "What is your name?" and you told him your name in Irish and then he said, "Where do you live?" and you told him that and you also told him that you had a father fortunately and that his name was such a thing and a mother and that you rose early in the morning and you washed your face and hands and you said your prayers and you came down stairs and you eat your breakfast and you ran joyfully to school and there you were with the fainne, but you didn't speak much Irish afterwards because nobody else much was speaking it anyhow and there was a favourite joke going the rounds about a sailor stopping a priest in a huge dock somewhere in the south of France and asking him directions for a place and the priest says: How did you know I spoke

English? and the sailor said : Oh, I saw the fainne in your buttonhole.

It's all a racket, people said, a few owl jossers making dough out of it, and there was all sorts of propaganda against it and very little for it. It was only the super optimists that could place their trust in the future and say well it took the english seven hundred years to <sup>almost</sup> wipe it out and we <sup>would</sup> ought to be able to put it back in half that time and then the politicians ~~can~~ make anybody laugh. They passed laws to make it compulsory and they rarely spoke a word of it themselves in the Dail and if you went to a meeting they always started the meeting with A Chairde Ghaedhael and after the two words they went on bawling in the King's English, so that it was a pantomime, and whenever you had to jape a politician you always stood up on a stool and in a big round voice you shouted out A Chairde Ghaedhael.

I thought of these things. I wasn't that averse to Irish. The few bits I had been able to read and understand seemed all right. There was some good poetry and the sound of the words was most beautiful, particularly the Connacht Irish with the big round vowel sounds that you could rumble with.

So I went down to the Taibhdhearc.

It was right beside the old Racquet Court. The Racquet Court was gone now. The front had been knocked into a big door and the <sup>inside</sup> was full of old cars with their guts torn out, and good cars and bad cars and the smell of oil and petrol. It made a good garage, but when I looked into it passing by, I felt sad and I looked towards the end of it where the stage used to be and I saw Pauline hanging over a gigantic cliff with her eyes wild and the villain chopping at her gripping fingers with a hatchet while Flossie made the piano hum with murder music. ~~Horror~~

This Taibhdhearc, the Irish name for the theatre had once been the confraternity hall where Father Crotty put on plays. My father used to act in those plays. I thought that was an odd coincidence, or what was so odd about it as I went in. It was a fairly large hall. There was a small balcony overhead. There was ~~an~~ stage at the far end and the body of the hall was cleared, with many folding chairs put back against the walls. A small bald man rose from a table and came over to me. He looked younger closer up that his baldness made him out to be. He was the producer.

I told him why I had come.

When I left again I was on the way to becoming an actor.



My mother didn't like this. She said what was it and where would it get you only sticking your examinations over it. I didn't know whether this was because being an actor brought back memories of my father or whether it was just the ingrained prejudice of ordinary people against the maker of a theatre. I said that it was all in Irish as if that made any difference but it seemed to be because the general impression of people was that anything that was in Irish had to be harmless.

It was a short piece I was in.

It was about the Croppy Boy. This was an ballad written in English about a hero of the '98 Rebellion. He was a young man going out to fight for his country and he comes to the Church to make his Confession to the priest and the priest listens to him and then throws off his cassock and displays the red coat of the tyrant and shouts ~~snick~~ at the young man and he is duly hanged. I was the villain. I liked that. I thought that to be a villain you could have guts. All the hero types seemed to be amiable and had a hard time being good and pure. Even in the films I thought this. I always thought I would like to be the villains in the films instead of the hero. I often wished that the villain would win in the films because he was always a better type of character than the really mouthed hero with the black circumstances.

The producer assured me that I would make a good villain if I stuck to it. He remarked that my face and general appearance was more in the line of villainous roles than the hero type. I wasn't insulted. I felt complimented. There weren't many rehearsals.

I had merely to sit and listen to the Croppy Boy's confession and when he had done to leap to my feet, draw my sword and sing a verse and a half about what happened the real priest and what we were going to do to him. I thought that was easy. The Irish wasn't so bad. I merely had to learn six lines off. It was just like school. I could always learn hitting things easily as long as the words sounded good.

To my surprise I found that I was considerably upset at the night of the performance drew near. I told myself that this was ridiculous, that it didn't matter, that we were only a curtain to the main event of the evening which was a two act play. I liked being dressed up in a red-coat Captain's ~~uniform~~ <sup>uniform</sup>. I thought everyone ought to swoon at the sight of a noble soldier. I could stick out my chest and hide the narrow way I arched at the back with the

ape of the cloak. I was sure I looked far older and maturer than my nearly sixteen years.

The night finally came.

I sat behind the curtain, alone in the chair, waiting for the Croppy Boy to come in and confess, with my gaudy uniform neatly covered and my head bowed. I knew there were not many people in the hall. It would hold nearly three hundred. At this time it rarely held more than twenty. They were enthusiasts. The common people were not yet keen on any theatre, not to mention a theatre putting on plays in what to them was a foreign language. So I knew all that. Nobody out there knew me, or would ever think about me again, and yet suddenly I could crack nuts between my shaking knees, and all the saliva had gone from my mouth leaving it dry, and although I had paid many visits to the lavatory below before coming onto the stage I was sorry I hadn't time to run again. This is nonsensical.

I couldn't hear the noise of the curtain going back because my head was bowed and my heart was thumping in my ears.

The introductory verse was sung about the youth has entered an empty hall what a lonely sound has his light foot fall and then the youth has knelt to tell his sins, In nomine Dei the youth begins and I heard the youth singing and his voice was quavering with terror. Why, I thought he feels as badly as I do, and that terrified me all the more. He had a very nice tenor voice but there were more quavers in it than the composer had put into the music. Dear God, I thought, I wish this was over. Then I thought, my bit is coming nearer, and wouldn't it be nice if when I rise up to draw the sword that I keep pulling at it and the sword refuses to come out of the scabbard. Rivers of sweat broke out all over my body at the thought, and almost washed away the panic.

Then the cue came and I rose and drew my sword and it came freely and the words were freely on my mouth and I thought why this is dead easy. All the fear and the panic was gone, and I thought isn't it a great pity that the poor people out there will only get to see me for a few lousy minutes when I could complete their night for them on my own, even if it was only singing the one verse over and over.

And then it was over and the curtain went back and where there should have been the cheering of mad multitudes and golden guineas being hurled on to the stage until we were up to our ankles in them, there was a few handclaps



from the miserable few in the hall. The handclapping stopped abruptly as if the echoes had frightened them. They were only clapping to warm their hands anyhow. I thought, what a debut!

That went on for four nights. I enjoyed it very much and at the end of that time I got a cheque for £1. I didn't want to take it. I believed that people had to work harder to earn a pound. They insisted. I thought it was the easiest earned pound I would ever get. They said, the place has a Government subsidy. You are not getting it out of our own pockets.

I brought the pound home and gave it to my mother.

She nearly fainted.

"You can keep it," I told her grandly. "It's the first money I ever earned and I give it to you." It was all right as a gesture but she would have to give it back on the double with the price of the pictures and this and that and if she demurred in the hereafter about subsidising your amusements you could always hint delicately that after all you earned some money for her. I thought it would prove an expensive pound for my mother.

I became as interested in the place then as I had earlier been interested in the forge. The next play was a saga with ancient Irish kings and queens and things, all dominated by an evil Druid. I was to be the Druid. I was to wear a long white robe and a whiskers to match. I used to go down there every free minute I had. I saw how flats were made stretching Japanese cotton over framework of two by one. I learned how to do that and how to mix the water paints to paint them. I thought it was a very smooth thing, painting taut cotton. There were also things to be learned about lights, big floods and baby spots with coloured gelatines that could make night day or day night, with the sun rising or falling or the moon bearing. It was all very interesting.

It was a long part and I was having severe trouble with the language.

Acting is instinctive. When you have learned what you have to say you give it meaning by listening to what another person on the stage has to say and you answer with the proper intonations and colour it with pictures in your mind. If you talk about a river you can see a river and it can be sad or bleak or broad flowing or tumultuous. That is fine when you don't have to think about the language as well. So you thought in English and you

Appendix 1.2 (Programme 1): *An Cropaí Óg* (The Croppy Boy), 9 – 11 July 1933

T110/27

CAIBDÉARC NA GAILLIMHE.

AN CÉAD LEIRIÚCÁN EILE:—  
**“BORUÍNA LAIGEAN”**  
 LE SEANA-SEÁN Ó CONCUBAIR  
 AR AN 29, 30 AGUS 31 IÚL, 1933.



9, 10 AGUS 11 IÚL, 1933

**“AN CROPAÍ ÓG”**  
 LE MUIRIS Ó CAIRÍN.

**“OIRCE MHAIC, A MHC UÍ DÓMHAILL”**  
 LE RÍOBÁRD Ó BRADHÁIN.

Comhlúac “An Cropaí Óg” Ceo., CLÓDÓIRÍ, GAILLIMH.

## “An Cúpaí Óg”

CEOL-DRÁMA AON-GRUAMH LE MUIRIS Ó CATÁIN.

FUIREANN.

An Cúpaí Óg	... ..	Dómnall Ó Liobáin.
“Ságar” (Cairdeán Airm)	... ..	Uaireán Macken.
Ságaróirí	... ..	P. Ó Cinnéroe.
	... ..	U. Ó Macána.
Eipe	... ..	Máire De Búrca.

Dit—Teac Ságar na mbliain 1798.

## “Oíche Máit, a mhic Uí Dómnall”

DRÁMA GRUAMH ÓA GRUAMH LE RÍOBAIRD Ó BRAONÁIN.

AISTRÉAD AG LIAM Ó BRIAIN.

Nachamel Reed	... ..	Pádraic Ó Cinnéroe.
Lizzie	... ..	Pionnpar Mac Diarmada.
Mollai Ní hAongusa	... ..	Máire De Búrca.
Jimmy Ó Dómnall	... ..	Micéal Ó Sabáin.
Orman Ó Grádaig	... ..	Ásúrín Ó hAodá.
John Smith	... ..	Uinníon Ó Macána.
Dean Uí hAongusa	... ..	Sigle Nic Fionngaille.
Saiphéac Ságaróirí Stórána	... ..	Liam Ó Briain.

Dit 7 Ain an Dráma—Teac Léirithe i mBaile Átha Cliath  
Seachtain Seó na 5Capall 1932.

Fear Léirithe 7 Scritéirí Eataróire	... ..	Pionnpar Mac Diarmada.
Fear Déanta na bFeircear	... ..	Tomás Mac An Rios
Ceól	... ..	Trío Tailéirí na Gaillimhe.



## " THE CROPPY BOY."

This is a dramatised version of the well known ballad of that name. The story is too familiar to need explanation.

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## " GOOD-NIGHT, MR. O'DONNELL."

Jimmy O'Donnell has come up from County Galway for the Horse Show with a letter of introduction to Mrs. Fennessy from Father Casey, who says that she keeps a nice quiet boarding-house, and will take as much care of Jimmy as his own mother. The house is full, and Mrs. Fennessy has to put up a bed for him in the sitting-room, but warns him that people say that the ghost of old Judge Billington walks in it at night.

In the room is a secret hiding-place, and amongst the people in the house are two crooks and a detective, who all suspect that the Crown jewels which were stolen from the Castle when Lord Aberdeen was Lord Lieutenant in 1907, are in this house. The jewels are worth £50,000.

Each of the three men who are searching for the jewels says in turn that he is Con Costello, the detective, and accuses everyone else of being crooks, and who's who is not sorted out till the last scene of the play.

Appendix 1.2 (Programme 2) *an áit a bfuil an chrois and na cruiteacháin*, 16 – 18 November 1933

*B. F. M. L. G. R.*

ΤΑΙΒΘΕΑΡΟ ΝΑ ΞΑΙΛΛΙΜΕ.



ΔΙΑΡΘΡΟΙΝ 16, ΔΙΑ Η-ΔΟΙΝΕ 17,  
ΔΙΑ ΣΑΤΑΙΡΗΝ 18,  
ΜΙ ΝΑ ΣΑΜΝΑ,  
1933.

## AN ÁIT A BRUIL AN CROIS.

("Where the Cross is Made.")

EUGENE O'NEILL do cheap an Bun-Dráma

TAOS Ó TUAMA DO CHUR I nGAEILS.

PUIREANN.

Nat Bartlett, mac d'Isaiah Bartlett ... Uinninnon Ó Matúna.  
An Doctóir Ó hUigín ... Auguirín Ó hAodá  
Sue Bartlett, inísean d'Isaiah Bartlett ...

Máire Nic Shiolla Máireín.

Isaiah Bartlett, Sean-Captaoin Luings ... Taos Ó Tuama.

Silas Horne, Máta (nac maíneann) ... Den

Cates, an Luingsreac (nac maíneann) ... Luins

Jimmy Kanana, Máirenealac (nac maíneann) ... "Mary Allen."

Prionnpiar Mac Diarmuid, Uairear Ó Maicín,

Miceal Ó Sabáin.

Áit don Dráma: I vceac an Captaoin Bartlett, ar bpuac na  
Fairise ar Cósta Tiar Aimeiricá.

## NA CRUICEADÁIN.

Dráma Dunuiste ar Sean-Sgéal Fraincise. Liam Ó Urian  
do élaon-aircís.

Máireín Liam ... Miceal Ó Sabáin.

Eilir a bean ... Máire Nic Shiolla Máireín

Thiúr Ceoltóir ... Diarmuid Ó Conaill,

Spáirve ... Uinninnon Ó Matúna.

Uairear Ó Maicín.

Spairpín Fánac ... Taos Ó Tuama.

I vceac Máireín Liam, na céadta bliain ó foin.

Prionnpiar Mac Diarmuid do léirís an dá Dráma.

Ceol: Tírio an Tairdear: Bean Nic Sabáin, Bean De Dair,

Eilir Nic Shiollaig.

Fear an Leiceadair: Tomás Mac an Ríogh.

### " WHERE THE CROSS IS MADE."

In a gloomy house, on the western coast of America, Nat Bartlett tells Doctor O'Higgins, of the local lunatic asylum, about his father. The father had been wrecked somewhere off Malacca, on a desert island, with seven companions. When rescued by natives a long time afterwards, he had brought home with him the other three survivors, Silas Horne, Cates, and Jimmy Kanaka, a native. The captain makes his son a heir to their "secret." On the island they had found a treasure (óir-Chiste) in the bulk of a wrecked pirate ship; had buried it and had made a map of the island and marked the spot. The captain had mortgaged his house, bought the "Mary Allen," had sent off the other three with the map to bring home the treasure. The only other copy was in Nat's possession. The captain had fitted up his house like a ship and spent all his time on the "top deck" watching and waiting. The son suggests to the doctor that this story is all hallucination on the part of the old man; that there never was any treasure; that the "Mary Allen" had been positively reported lost with all hands. The doctor agrees to return soon and take the old man away. In a passionate dialogue with his sister, Nat screams that his life has been ruined, the book he wants to write stifled by this family obsession, and finally he burns his copy—the only surviving copy of the map. Just then his father descends from above, announces the return of the "Mary Allen." She is in the harbour. The son sees her too. But the sister sees nothing. Three drowned sailors enter carrying a treasure-chest! One hands something to the old man. The doctor comes back, the old man is found dead, and Nat finds in his hand what the drowned man had brought back to him—the map with the cross on it marking the place where the treasure was buried!

### " THE HUNCHBACKS."

"Na Cruiteacháin" ("The Hunchbacks") is the story of a young wife who has a thin time of it with an old miser of a husband. He goes on a journey, or pretends to, and returns once or twice to see what she is doing. She invites in three strolling musicians and determines to have one evening's sport. But a sad accident happens, which she turns to good account, however, thanks to a very credulous peasant who is passing by and who believes firmly in sorcery. The play has a happy ending.

2-2-0  
10-0-0  
11-0-0  
16-0-0  
20-0-0

**Appendix 1.2      (Programme 3): *íosagán* and *scapin na gcleas*, 12 – 14 December 1933**





## “ ÍOSAĞÁN ”

(Le DÁORAIS MAC PIARAS).

AN FUIREANN.

Sean-Maiciar	... ..	Uaicéar Ó Maicín.
Iosağán	... ..	Dáoraís De Paor.
Dáoraís	... ..	Seán Ó Cinnéroe.
Dapaí	... ..	Dearmúgánn Ó Connis.
Cóilín	... ..	Micéal Ó Beirn.
Eóin	... ..	Seán Ó Concubair.
Cuimin	... ..	Pearar Ó Máille.
Féicín	... ..	Caomhín Ó Fáiléir.
An Margoean	... ..	Máire De Dárcá.
Naomh Iorap	... ..	Taos Ó Tuama.

(Buacailtí Coláirce Iognáir Naomha atá a5 cósáil páirteanna na bpáirtí ran dráma seo).

Aic do'n Dráma ... .. 1 nlaiccar na héireann.

## “ SCAPIN NA GELEAS ”

le molière.

(AISTRISTE A5 TOMÁS Ó h-ÉINEACÁIN).

Argante, Aicair Octave 7 Gerbinette	... ..	Seán Ó Concubair.
Geronte, Aicair Leandre 7 Hyancinte	... ..	Águircín Ó hAoda.
Octave, Leannán Hyancinte	... ..	Uimionn Ó Matúna.
Leandre, Leannán Hyancinte	... ..	Uaicéar Ó Maicín.
Hyancinte	... ..	Eidlin Ní Súilleabáin.
Gerbinette	... ..	Máire De Dárcá.
Scapín, Siolta Leandre	... ..	Taos Ó Tuama.
Sylvester, Siolta Octave	... ..	Pronnriar Mac Diarmada.
Nerine, Banatríá Hyancinte	... ..	Sáinne Ní Máille.
Carle, Rógaire	... ..	Diarmad Ó Lómrís.
Fear Iompar	... ..	Dáoraís Ó Maicleoró.
Aic do'n Dráma	... ..	Naples.
Pronnriar Mac Diarmada do léirís an dá Dráma, a5ur a ceap		Feircear Scáitre.

Tomar Mac An Rios do pinne an Feircear Scáitre.

Uimionn Ó Matúna	... ..	Dainirceóir Scáitre.
Uaicéar Ó Maicín	... ..	Fear na bFeircear.
Ceol	... ..	Trío Taibbéair na Sallime

### SYNOPSIS

"IOSAGAN." The story of P. H. Pearse's little masterpiece is too familiar to need explanation.

"THE ROGUERIES OF SCAPIN" (1671) is a farce rather than a comedy.

Two young men of Naples, Octave, son of Argante, and Leandre, son of Geronte, are in trouble. Octave, during his father's absence from home, has secretly married a strange young woman, Hyacinth, who has been stranded in the town by a shipwreck. Now his valet, Sylvestre, tells him his father intends to marry him to the daughter of his old friend, Geronte, and that this daughter has already sailed from Taranto for this purpose. In despair he implores the help of Scapin, Leandre's valet. Scapin reasons with Argante. He tells him Octave was forced to marry the young woman by her relations! The old man declares he will break his son's marriage by law and disinherit him. Scapin calms him.

In the second act, Geronte blames Argante himself for his son's act of disobedience. Argante retorts that maybe Geronte's own son, Leandre, has not behaved too correctly during his father's absence. Geronte gets suspicious. He asks Leandre what he has been up to. Scapin, he says, has told him something. Leandre has, in fact, something on his conscience. He has fallen in love with a gipsy girl, Zerbinette. Leandre falls upon Scapin for betraying his secret. Scapin confesses several things, but denies that crime. He resolves to have his revenge on Geronte.

News is brought that the gipsies are going to carry off Zerbinette if Leandre does not send them 500 crowns. Octave, on the other hand, must have 200 ducats at once. Scapin begins with Argante. He tells him he has arranged for the rupture of his son's marriage for 200 ducats. He deters Argante from taking the law. He introduces Sylvestre in disguise as a swashbuckling relation of the girl, looking for Argante's blood. Argante pays up.

Geronte arrives. Scapin, weeping and wailing, tells him the bad news he has for him. His son is held to ransom on a Turkish galley. Geronte finally stumps up. But Scapin is not finished with him.

In the next act, he tells Geronte that those blood-thirsty braves, the relations of Octave's wife, believe that his, Geronte's, desire to marry his own daughter to Octave had been the real cause of Argante's desire to annul his son's marriage. They had resolved to wipe out this insult in Geronte's blood. Even now they are looking for him. But Scapin has a plan to save him.

The play has to be ended somehow. Hyacinthe turns out to be Geronte's shipwrecked daughter: Zerbinette is Argante's child, lost in infancy. Everybody is happy and determined to punish Scapin. But that is easier said than done.

## Appendix 1.3

Page 1 of 10 pages from school note book titled: *Ceart agus Cúiteamh.*

"Cespe 7 Cureaig" (Mayon Reynel  
of Galway) ~~Curiaig~~ (Fide  
in Prelude) to P. m. a. b. m.  
drama to P. m. a. b. m. a. d. c.  
~~Curiaig~~ ~~Prelude~~ to full & the  
fade out. Pause Prelude full &  
the pause.

[illegible]

People - Hairy, & lousy, live in  
the house! Help, help, through!  
(Bend St. Paul)

People - Neighbors of George Smith & Captain  
- his housewife - (Chero)

## Appendix 1.4 *Ceart agus Cúiteamh*, 7-10 March 1934 (Front and back pages)

### Synopsis.

The play is based on the well-known Galway tradition of Mayor Lynch Fitzstephen's hanging of his son, Walter, in 1493 for his crime of killing a young Spaniard through jealousy; the Spaniard being at the time a guest in his own house. The tradition constantly represents Mayor Lynch hanging his son with his own hands, all others including the official executioner having refused, through pity, to perform the grim task.

At the opening of the play, we see Galway's sons repelling an attack on the town by the "Ferocious O'Flahertys." Walter Lynch is the hero and darling of the people. He is in love with Una Blake. His father, the Mayor, departs for Spain on a "trade mission." Walter deputises for his father, and between the duties of his office and perhaps an exaggerated sense of his new importance, neglects Una, who takes umbrage thereat and after a quarrel, breaks off their engagement. The father returns after some months with a young Spaniard, Don Gonsalvo. He becomes friends with Walter and also with Una. Walter has become despondent and reckless and begins to frequent the tavern. Gonsalvo when he understands the situation pleads earnestly with Una to take back his new and dear friend, Walter. Walter sees them together, misunderstands and runs him through with a dagger.

There follows the court-scene, the condemnation, the wave of pity that sweeps over the town, the vain pleadings with the father, the refusal of officers and of executioner to do their duty, and finally Mayor Lynch doing "stern and unbending justice" with his own hands. A short epilogue shows the two principal survivors in after life.

Comhúic "An Cúiteamh Connacra" Teo., Clóidrí, Sárilm.



1934-35

bun-leimicán

"CEART AGUS CÚITEAMH"

7-10 Márta 1934.

# Ceart agus Cúiteamh, (Inside pages)

## "CEART AGUS CÚITEAMH"

1 REAM-RAÐARC, TRÍ SHIONN 7 CRÍOC-RAÐARC.

PROINSIAS MAC DIARMAIDA DO SHMOB AGUS DO LÉING.

Séamur Ó Loinnig, Máire ... Liam Mac Seairte.  
Caitlín, a bean ... Máirín Ní Laoilgear  
Uailtéar, Mac Leo 7 Caitlín Sárdaí na Cártaí

DIARMAID Ó CONAILL.

Séamur Dán Mac Aodá, Feiliméar Sarobh 7 Cara Uailtéar  
Mícheál Ó Gabáin.

Liam de Bláca ... Seán Ó Concubair.

Camilla, a bean ... Eórlín Ní Súilleabáin.

ilna, ingean Leo 7 Leanann Uailtéar ... Máire Ní Siolla Máirín.

Don Gonzalvo Gomez, Spáinneac Óg ... Uiníonn Ó Macána.

An t-Adair Antoine ... Séamur Dheathac.

• Séamur Skeffert, Maor ... Pádraig Ó Coinnig.

Caitlín Sárdaí na Cártaí ... Eamonn Agar

Cléireac na Cúirce ... Séamur Dheathac.

Ceannaire na gCoirteóirí ... Máirín Ó Néandán

Seapabontai Uí Loinnig } ... { Máire Dheathac,  
{ Máire Ní a Dáir.

Crocaóirí ... Victor Talbot.

140 Saigóirí ... Liam Ó Dongaile.

240 „ ... Ailín Mac Eócaró

340 „ ... Leon Ó Ceallaig.

440 „ ... Séamur Dheathac.

Fir Uairle, Comhairleoirí, Saigóirí, rrl.—P. Ó Ceallaig, P.

Ó Riagáin, A. Ó h'Allmháin; S. Mac Dubáin, D. Ó Macána,

L. Ó Sínín, V. Mac Congaile, P. Ó Draonáin, P. Mac Canna,

M. Ó Congaile, T. Ó Cataill, T. Ó h'Eócaró, M. Ó Maolcóirí,

E. Ó Fataig.

Mná Uairle, Rinneoirí, rrl.—Máire Dheathac, Máire Ní a

Dáir, Caitlín Ní Deagá, Máirín Ní Meanamán, V. Ó

h'Allmháin, Nóra Ní Dubáig, Spáinne Ní Máille, M. Ní

Faoice, E. Ní Muirceartaig, M. Ní Céitinn, N. Ní Corrair, E.

Ní Cacán, M. Ní Fláiceartaig, M. Ní Suair, A. Ní Dubáin,

M. Ní an Iomair, M. Ní Dómnail, N. Ní Dóitín, M. Ní

Dheathac.

## REATH-RAOARC.

CYOR CAOB IRDIS DE SEATA CUARÓ NA SAILLIME I MI NA  
DEALTIME, 1492.

### 140 GNIOMH.

RAOARC A 1—TEAC LIAM DE DLÁCA TRATHÓNA I MI AN EANAIR, 1493.

RAOARC A 2—AN DIT CÉADNA AN OÍDCE CIL REACTHAINÉ 'NA DÍAT  
FIN.

### GNIOMH A 2.

RAOARC A 1—TEAC UI LOINRIS I MI AN MEITHIN, 1493.

RAOARC A 2—TEAC CAIRBHE, CIL REACTHAINÉ 'NA DÍAT FIN.

RAOARC A 3—SÁIRIÚIN I N-ÁICE CAIRLEÁN DE DLÁCA AN OÍDCE  
CÉADNA.

RAOARC A 4—DIT CÉADNA, MAROIN LÁ 'NA DÁRAIC.

### GNIOMH A 3.

RAOARC A 1—TEAC NA CÁIRTE.

RAOARC A 2—SEOMPA I SCARLEÁN UI LOINRIS OÍDCE POIN LÁ AN  
CROCTA.

RAOARC A 3—SEOMPA CIMEADTA I SCARLEÁN UI LOINRIS MAROIN  
AN CROCTA.

## ~~CRIOC-RAOARC.~~

~~CLOCTAÍ 7 CAIRLEÁN UI LOINRIS.~~

FEAR DÉANTA NA DFEIRTEAR... .. TOMAR MAC AN RÍOIS.

DAIRTEOIRI STÁIRE ... .. SEÁN Ó CONCUBAIR 7  
UINIONN Ó MACÁNA.

FEAR NA DFEIRTEAR ... .. SEAMUR DNEACTAC.

CEOL ... .. TMO NA CAIDDEIRCE.

TÁ LÚC SCÁIPTA NA CAIDDEIRCE FAOI CUMANIN MÓR AG MÁIRE,  
DEAN CAIRPIN UI CONCUBAIR A PINNE FURMÓR DE ÉULTADA NA MÍHAN  
AG PAN DRÁMA.



*Mayor Lynch of Galway, 18-19 October 1935 (Front and back pages)*

**SOLDIERS**—Christopher Townley, J. J. Kearney, Liam Burke,  
Martin Barrett, Francis Rabbitt, James  
McNally, J. Breen, Edward Hogan, Liam  
Fortune.

**CITIZENS**—Annie Kelly, Peggy Grealish, Lily Keenan, Fannie  
Long, Brigid Coppinger, Delia Flaherty,  
Eileen Duffily, John Doherty, James  
Coyne, Leo Kelly.

**DANCERS**—Brigid Hanley, Doris Larkin.

**SPANISH LADIES**—May O'Flaherty, Teresa Corrigan, Marie  
Lanahan, Mary Walsh, Peggy Burke,  
Fannie Long, Bridie Healy, Annie Kelly,  
Peggy Grealish, Lily Keenan.

**JURYMEN**—J. J. Kearney, John Doherty, Patrick Walsh, James  
Muhaly, Leo Kelly.

*First run 1935-36 in Empire Theatre, Galway*

*Empire Theatre*

The Art Players

present

# Mayor Lynch of Galway

by

FRANK DERMODY.

(Translated from the Irish.)



*(Comb)  
cinema?*

Business Manager: Captain Sean O'Connor.

Assist. Business Manager: Desmond Kenny.

PRICE TWOPENCE.

*Tramway, Limited, Galway.*

*19-10 Oct. 1935*

*Mayor Lynch of Galway*, October 1935 (inside pages)

# "Mayor Lynch of Galway."

(A PLAY IN A PROLOGUE AND NINE SCENES.)

Time and Place of Play: The City of Galway in 1492—1493.

## PROLOGUE.

A Wayside Shrine inside the walls of the City in June, 1492—before dawn.

## ACT I.

Scene I. A room in Blake's Castle—six months later.

Scene II. The same scene a fortnight later.

## ACT II.

Scene I. A room in Lynch's Castle in May, 1493.

Scene II. A tavern in Galway on the night of the 10th June, 1493.

Scene III. A garden in the grounds of Blake's Castle that night.

Scene IV. Same scene on the following morning.

## ACT III.

Scene I. A court room—two days later.

Scene II. Same as Scene I., Act II., the night before the execution.

Scene III. An attic in Lynch's Castle on the morning of the execution.

## MUSIC.

We are indebted to Miss Poppy Courtney for the following original compositions specially composed for this production:—

Scene II., Act I.—"An Irish Love Lament,"  
"Walter's Serenade."

Scene I., Act II.—"Spanish Love Song,"  
"An Irish Love Song."

Scene II., Act II.—"Drinking Song,"  
"The Dream Song,"  
"Springtime in Seville."

Scene II., Act III.—"Lost Hope."

Director and Producer ..... Frank Dermody.  
Art Director ..... James Walsh.  
Director of Music (Piano) ..... Dodo Courtney, A.T.C.L.  
(Violin) Poppy Courtney.  
(Cello) Imelda O'Reilly.  
Director of Dancing ..... Myra Hardiman.  
Costumiers ..... Kitty O'Dea.  
Mary Walsh.  
Stage Manager ..... Ed. J. Ashe.  
Assist. Stage Manager ..... William Walsh.  
Property Manager ..... Thomas Healy.  
Electrician and Stage Hand ..... Thomas King.

## CAST.

JAMES LYNCH FITZ-STEPHENS ..... WALTER MACKEN  
KATHERINE, his wife ..... KITTY O'DEA  
WALTER, their son ..... DERMOT O'CONNELL  
WILLIAM BLAKE ..... THOMAS HEALY  
CAMILLA, his wife ..... PEGGY KENNY  
ANNA, their daughter ..... MAY KILMARTIN  
DON GONSALVO GOMEZ ..... PATRICK RYAN  
PRIAR ANTHONY ..... JAMES WALSH  
SEAMUS BAWN McHUGH, a farmer ..... MICHAEL GAVIN  
SEAMUS SKERRET, a herd ..... JAMES COYNE  
CAPTAIN FRANCIS KIRWIN ..... WILLIAM WALSH  
TAVERN-KEEPER ..... ED. J. ASHE  
EXECUTIONER ..... PATRICK WALSH  
ELLEN, a maid in Lynch's ..... MARY WALSH  
CLERK OF THE COURT ..... CHRISTOPHER TOWNLEY  
FOREMAN OF THE JURY ..... ED. J. ASHE  
O'FLAHERTY, the Chiefan ..... JAMES MULCAHY



**Appendix 1.5:** Pages 187 to 191 from *Cockle and Mustard* dealing with the unveiling of the Ó Conaire statue by Eamon de Valera, President of the Executive Council of the Irish Free State and his attendance at the performance in Taibhdhearc na Gaillimhe of *La Merveilleuse histoire do jeune Bernard de Menthon* by Henri Ghéon on the 9 June 1935.

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Once in our town there had been a little man who wandered around on his own or travelled the roads with a donkey. He needn't have done that, He just wanted to be free. He would tour the country as he liked and in between he would write stories in Irish, ~~about~~ <sup>about</sup> stories containing the germ genius of simplicity. He drank a bit and was free and people used to laugh at him when he was alive, and say, Ah, Poor ould Padraic is drunk again.

Now they were putting up his statue in the Square.

The time I remembered having seen him, he was sitting on the steps of a rostrum in the Square with his head in his hands. There had been a big political meeting and now it was over and there was nothing left of it except the empty rostrum and the square littered with leavings. There were a few kids in front of him and they were jeering at the lone figure of the little drunken man sitting on the steps. They would bend down sometimes and pick up orange peelings and pelt them at him. He never dodged. They were not very good shots, I thought at the time. If it had been some of us fellows from the west, we would not have missed. He just raised his head and rested his chin in the palm of his hand and looked over their heads. Into some far distance, or just into nothing, I don't know. Now they were unveiling his statue and he would sit forever in our square with the hat on the back of his head. The ~~politicians~~ <sup>politicians</sup> of the town would pay tribute to his memory and his genius. They would make long speeches about him, and it was really mainly the kids going to school who read him and that because they were forced to and got no enjoyment out of him on that account. He was just ould Irish again to them.

Big shots were coming from Dublin too. The very biggest there was, the Right big shot.

So, said the producer, this occasion must not be allowed to slip. When he comes down to unveil Padraic, we will have a play on that will shake him to the soles of his boots, and he will immediately increase our grant from its six hundred to a thousand, two thousand, ten thousand even, when he

sees what wonderful work we are doing for a real Irish drama.

The play was one of Gheen's, translated into Irish. It was about St. Bernard de Menthon. I didn't think it was a good play. It was all mixed up with a bit of realism here, a touch of history there, phantasy, credulity and religion, in a mixture that would strain the belief of even a primitive father. But it was religion with spectacle and we were spending all the money in the kitty to make it big. The real big shot had said he would be there. Notice to this effect was put in the local paper and everyone immediately started to book seats for the big night. Nobody had ever booked seats before. The play would run for a week. Nobody was booking seats for any other night except the first night when the great man would be present.

They would be hanging out of the roof.

"Where will he sit? Will he be up or down stairs? What row?"

I thought the theatre was suddenly becoming very popular. Of course its owing to the reputation the place has gained, the excellence of the production, the wonder of the acting, the design of the settings and the costumes, even maybe they were coming to see a play. The big man had nothing to do with it. Wait'll they get a sight of the pillar of the statue of Jupiter, bursting open and the devil bursting out to make a meal of the tenth pilgrim to pass up the hall on his way over the mountains. Then they will have seen everything. I bet nobody ever knew the devil was a real cannibal. Wait'll we show them. The devil could eat souls of course everybody knew that, but in this play he was not having a meal of the spirit but he would be gorging himself on a grand plump pilgrim.

And everything was built and was being painted except the statue of Jupiter that would grace the pillar.

In the hall we were talking about this, whether it should be fashioned from wood or just painted or what and then we looked around and a small tubby man was standing there looking at us.

"Hello," said the little man.

"Hello," we said, waiting for the little man to start begging.

"What are yiz at?" the little man asked.

"Why," we said loftily, "we are about to create a statue of Jupiter."

"Oh," he said. He came over to us. "Give 's a hammer and a box and a few nails" the little man said.

It was decided to humour himself and his Dublin accent.

Shortly the thing was taking shape, bits of wood nailed here and a bit of canvas there and another box here with wire netting entwined in it.

"How if we had the clay," the man said.

The stuff was got for him, and under his small hands a big dignified face began to appear with curly whiskers and the ends of two porter bottles as eyes with lights behind them to make them glow. The tubby little man was the fellow who had made the statue of Padraic.

He ~~should~~ have been somewhere with people feting him, telling him ~~what~~ a genius he was. I didn't think it right that he should have been down there with us in a grubby little theatre getting plastered with Paris up to the eyes, and he humming away little ditties, and explaining in a rich Dublin accent about things. I reflected that with good things there must be simplicity. This tubby little man made you think that. It was hard to forget the first time you saw him coming in the door and you feeling in your pocket for small change. Until you saw his eyes of course.

He ~~also~~ made hell, where the devil bursts out of the pillar, a streak of gold paper there a touch of scarlet paint here.

"Yiz'll be fine now," he said when it was all done and he went his way.

Apart from the fact that I was doing the part of the saint in the play, I had an added interest in it now, owing to the fact that I thought I was falling in love with my mother, the mother of the saint, that is.

The producer had a way of recruiting people. Most people were reluctant to have anything much to do with a theatre anyhow, and when it was all in Irish it didn't make it any easier. He had to go out really searching for this one because it was important and because it needed such a large cast. Peggy was his strangest recruit. Her father owned the town paper of which he was editor. She was news editor and by all accounts a very good one. She worked very hard seemed far too practical to be mixed up in something that was even more ephemeral than a newspaper. She was fairhaired and wore dark brown suits and I often saw her cycling to work down ~~near~~ the lane near where we used to live when I would be on my way home to breakfast after Mass. I don't know how the producer got her to come down, but he did and one ~~day~~ night at a rehearsal Paddy and myself were sitting below watchong and there was an act going on on the stage. There were rostrums every-

where and it is a strange thing that if you put actors on the stage with a rostrum they stand on it with one leg up on a high step and the other down. People seem incapable of standing with two feet on the same step.

" Begod, " said Faddy, " Peggy has a damn fine leg. "

I sat up.

" Damn good, " I said. " Peggy's leg. Remember the stick of Peggy's leg we used to buy long ago for a penny. It would last you for a lifetime. "

" That's right, " he said.

I thought it was funny that I should have said that.

I liked talking to her. When a person goes into a theatre, it seems imperative that you must put on an act. It seems to be an integral part of the theatre, that people never ~~xxx~~ disclose themselves. You could nearly number the poses that people adopt to keep their own personalities secret. You are gay, or a little bawdy, or delicately obscene, or frivolous, or terribly theatrical about the inner meaning of plays and the authors. It's an adopted personality which has nothing to do with the person. After years and years and years old actors in the main have lost their own personality completely and even bring this strange theatrical one home with them and live with it constantly. It is no wonder that sometimes they feel terribly frustrated.

Peggy hadn't even a glimmering of this. Sometimes if I was putting on the act like we all did, I would suddenly catch her eye on me and for no reason feel angry, and add ~~a~~ a little to it, <sup>giving</sup> ~~gave~~ it profundity and colour.

I tried all the well worn ways of getting closer to her. No, she wasn't going my way, she was meeting a girl friend up in the cafe for supper. There was always somebody. Well to hell with her, I'm not going to try it again. Sometime in the distant future she'll think back on this and know what she missed.

The great day dawned.

We didn't see them unveiling the statue. It must have been good. We were too busy putting the finishing touches to something that we were betting on to enlarge our future.

A fly would have had difficulty in getting into the place. We even had an orchestra that played the National Anthem when the great one appeared.

The curtain went up.

The play lasted a long time. Then we waited for him to come around and tell us how wonderful we were.

It was strange meeting somebody like him, who had been a hero to you all

your young life. A strange tall man with glasses and a deep voice, dressed soberly, an upright man uncorrupted by power and position. You looked at him as he shook your hand and tried to see the revolutionary with flaring eyes, wreathed in the smoke of fire and bullets, or with the smell of prison off him. It was hard to see those things.

"It's the best show I have ever seen," the great one said.

"He only saw one other in his life," an aide said behind his hand. I didn't mind that. Indeed there was something nice and simple about it.

Then he was gone.

All the chairs were pulled back. We were sure we were on to a good thing. Now when we wrote to the cold department we would have something solid to go by. The directors thought that it was as good as done. There was stout and whiskey and champagne and brandy. Not out of theatre funds which didn't exist. Out of a collection of pockets. Peggy had supplied the champagne, since she was the only one in the place who was earning proper money.

I had never drunk champagne. I had never drunk brandy.

I was sitting on a seat in the balcony with the glass raised to my lips, thinking, well now we'll see what this champagne stuff is like mixed with brandy. Something joggled my elbow and the glass tilted and its contents spilt all over my suit. It was a nice <sup>new</sup> suit. It was a brown suit and it was the first suit I had ever paid for myself. It was ~~tailor~~-made as distinct from ~~cheap~~ stock size and I had gone reckless having the best trimmings put on it, sort of satin linings and what not.

"Jay," I said, "you have ruined my suit."

"I'm sorry," Peggy said. She tried to rub off some of the stuff with a small handkerchief. I could smell her perfume as she bent down.

"Did you do that deliberately?" I asked grimly, a suspicion dawning on me.

"Certainly not," she said. "Why should I do a thing like that?"

"No why," I said. "I thought you might have done it deliberately."

"Would I go around spilling champagne that I supplied myself?" she asked.

"I don't suppose you would," I said. "We'll go down and get another."

"I don't want it," she said. "I don't touch it."

"Oh," I said.

"And young fellows like you shouldn't be going around drinking champagne and brandy," she said.

## Appendix 1.6

Frank Dermody's reference for Walter Macken written on behalf of the Directors of Taibhdhearc na Gallimhe and dated 8 February 1937.



### TAIBHDEARC NA GAILLIMHE.

Scríobóir:  
An t-Ollamh Liam Ó Dúlain,  
Captaín Seán Ó Conéubair,  
An t-Oll. Diarmuid Ó Murcháda,  
Seánur De Buiroc.

Léirísteoir 7 Damirceoir:  
Prionnias Mac Dáiríosa.

Rúnaite:  
Máire Nic Siolla Mártain.

February 8 1937

(GAELIC NATIONAL THEATRE - GALWAY)

TO ALL WHOM IT MAY CONCERN.

Walter A. Macken has been employed as leading man and Business Manager in the Gaelic National Theatre (subsidised by the Free State Department of Education) since July 1932, entering the Theatre while yet attending the Patriotic School, Secondary Education Branch, Galway. Since then he has taken leading parts in thirty full length and thirty-six one-act plays - including well known plays of SHAW: "Arms and the Man" etc; MOLIERE: "Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme" etc; SHERIFF: "Journey's End" etc; GOGOL: "Marriage" etc; YEATS: "Gaitlin Ní h-Uallachan" etc., SUNGE: "Riders to the Sea" etc; SHAKESPEARE: "Macbeth" etc., HENRY GHEON: "The Marvellous Life of Bernard de Menthon" "Le Pont Au Diable" etc; SIERRA: "Two Shepherds". EUGENE O'NEILL: "Where the Cross is made"; LENNOX ROBINSON: "The White headed boy" etc., LADY GREGORY: "Jail Gates" etc., DUNSANY: "Night at the Inn" etc., DOUVERNOIS: "Le Professeur" TOREHOW: "Three Sisters"; TOLSTOY: (Myles Malleson) "Michael" - as well as several original Irish Plays by eminent Irish Playwrights. These include such plays as "Leinster Tribute" "Mayor Lynch of Galway," "In Ille Tempore", "The Curse," "The Farm," and many others.

Mr. Macken is in my opinion the most outstanding character actor (comedy and tragedy) in Ireland to-day not excluding the Abbey Theatre. My contention may be substantiated by a perusal of many press notices which he has received. As regards his personal character I have always found him to be honest upright and trustworthy in every respect.

Although his departure will be an irreparable loss



## TAIBDHEARC NA GAILLIMHE.

Scrútoirí:  
An t-Ollamh Liam Ó Dúmain,  
Captaín Seán Ó Conchubair,  
An t-Oll. Diarmuid Ó Murcháda,  
Seamus De Valmor.

Léirighéir 7 Dairigheir:  
Droimnagar Mac Darrmacha.

Réanairé:  
Máire Nic Siolla Márcain.

to this Theatre, nevertheless he carries with him into what we are sure will be a brilliant theatrical future the best wishes and recommendations of myself and my co-directors, knowing as we do that his success will also reflect credit on this theatre which he in no small way helped to bring to its present influential position in the Irish Theatrical world.

SIGNED

*Provisional Secretary*  
*(Dermott Murphy)*  
*Producers & Managers*  
*Provisional Secretary*  
*Provisional Secretary*

on behalf of the Directors of the Taibdhearc na Gaillimhe.

(Liam O'Brain, M.A. University College, Galway, Professor of Romance Languages; Dr. Dermott Murphy, M.A. D. Litt. Ph. B. Professor of English University College, Galway. Seamus Wilmot, B. A. B. Comm., Town Clerk Urban District Council, Galway. Captain Sean O'Connor, O.C. Vickers Gun Section 1 st. Batt. Irish Rifles Galway.)

## **Chapter 2: The return to Taibhdhearc na Gaillimhe**

### **Appendices 2.1-2.15**



## Appendix 2.1

Report on Charley's Aunt in The Connacht Tribune, 17 June 1939, page 3

### **"CHARLEY'S AUNT" GREET'S YOU.**

#### **Sparkling Comedy At Taibhdhearc Na Gaillimhe.**

When the curtain rose at Taibhdhearc na Gaillimhe last night (Thursday) Galplaygoers had the privilege of witnessing the world's greatest comedy. "Charley's Aunt," produced for the first time in Gaelic. The excellent entertainment provided in such a hilarious comedy as this, is too well known to call for enlarging upon. From beginning to end it is a feast of mirth, melody, and laughter.

The Taibhdhearc staff spared no effort to make this show a memorable one and their efforts are rewarded in the staging, beautiful settings and scenic effects. It is doubtful if anything so lavish has been seen on the Taibhdhearc stage since its inception. This is the last show of the season. It will be repeated to-night (Friday) and on Saturday and Sunday nights at 8.15 each night.

The cast, chosen with care for their suitability and merit, have been rehearsing diligently for the past few weeks under the leadership of Walter Macken, who is producing his first programme. Such well-known Taibhdhearc artists as May Kilmartin, Sean Naughton, Michael O'Beirne, Brian Scanlon, John Horan, Mick Conneely, and the Misses Evelyn O'Sullivan, Mary Walsh, and Eibhlin O'Beirne have important parts to interpret. Seamus Breathnach is in charge of the costumes and musical accompaniment is being provided by the recently formed Taibhdhearc Trio. Mr. P. O'Connor is in charge of the settings.

Owing to the fact that the matinees are limited to two, it is considered advisable for heads of schools to arrange beforehand with the management of the theatre with a view to having seats reserved for children as reserved seats cannot be given.

*Connacht Tribune  
17 June 1939 P.3*

Review of *Juno and the Paycock* from *The Irish News and Belfast Morning News*, 4 May 1943, page 3

## **"JUNO AND THE PAYCOCK" AT THE HIPPODROME**

"Juno and the Paycock" was very efficiently handled at the Hippodrome last night. The players, who came from each of the four Provinces, several being from the Abbey Theatre, succeeded in getting across the deep poignancy, bitter gloom, turmoil, delicate vein of comedy and frustration of O'Casey's greatest tragedy.

Noel Purcell, the well-known Dublin character actor and comedian, gave a masterful performance, playing the "chancer." Walter Macken's "Captain Boyle" was also a good piece of comedy acting.

There is no hero, and the real heroine is the mother, Juno, who was sympathetically played by Anne Clery.

There was one real discovery who received rounds of applause. She was a young actress, Moira Keeley, who played the part of Mary, the daughter, with vitality, freshness and charm.

Others in the cast were—Neville Peterson, Diana Romney, Maurice Selwyn, Shiela Maguire, Stephen Brennan, Ronald Ibbs, Joseph Nolan, Michael Murphy, Patrick Devlin, John Healy, Cecil Reade, Deirdre Halligan and Maureen Halligan.

Peggy Dell and her band contributed to an enjoyable variety show, which included—Black and Richardson, Doyle twins, Ursula and Noel, Morrelli Bros. and Angelina, Annette, Comerford Dancers, Merry Macks, Joseph M'Laughlin, Will Duffy and Pearly.

## Appendix 2.3

### Programme pages for the Royal Hippodrome, Belfast presentation which opened on the 3 May 1943

Back page

A few days ago a well-known stage star was seen in the vicinity of Mr. Birch's office. When asked what this implied, Mr. Birch said, "Oh, that's for June. The Belfast people have supported me so well up to now that I cannot resist staging something sensational in June. This has now been arranged."

Mr. Birch did hint, however, that one of the greatest shows ever to appear on any stage has also been booked for September, and certain outlines of famous acts have been taken for the next three years. 1944 should see some remarkable changes in the Royal Hippodrome, and as Mr. Birch says that as soon as permit conditions allow artists to come over from across the water who are now famous, but have so far not been in Ulster, the theatre that first stages them will be rendering a valuable service to the theatre-going public of Belfast, and he is determined that the Hippodrome shall be that theatre.

**"PLA-VAUDE-BAND"**  
Second Edition

21st JUNE, 1943 - for six days positively

All new Acts and Stage Presentations including Ireland's most sensational play the film version of which was banned in Northern Ireland

**"THE PLOUGH AND THE STARS"**

Front page

★

★ THREE SHOWS IN ONE  
FOR THE PRICE OF ONE ★

G. L. BIRCH presents

A THREE-AND-A-HALF HOUR SHOW

**"PLA-VAUDE-BAND"**

First Time in the World

ROYAL HIPPODROME

3rd MAY - SIX DAYS ONLY

2.30 - DAILY - 7.0

Programme Price Threepence

★

Page 2

SEAN O'CASEY'S  
FAMOUS IRISH PLAY  
Produced by Carl Clopet

**"JUNO AND THE PAYCOCK"**

DIANA ROMNEY, RONALD IRBS, with the  
Clopet Company, including many Abbey Players

Nine Big Acts!

PEGGY DELL  
BLACK & RICHARDSON  
First Time Here  
THE DOYLE TWINS  
"DUSULA and NOEL"  
MORELLI BROS. and  
ANGELINA  
ANNETTE  
The Shipping Rope Wonder

THE  
COMERFORD TROUPE  
OF IRISH DANCERS  
THE MERRY MACS  
Ireland's Western Brothers  
JOSEPH McLAUGHLIN  
In New Songs and Old  
WILL DUFFY  
Gentleman Comedy Cyclist,  
with  
PEARL


**MUSIC FOR ALL** By PEGGY DELL  
and HER BAND

First Time in Northern Ireland

Leading: Edna Lanchester, Bobby Lawless, Andy Lewis, Barry Moran, Jack Butler, Willie Davis, Alec McGuinness, Eamon Murphy, John Kane, Sidney Sheppard, Seely Flood, Sid Cusker

Page 3

MR. BIRCH  
thanks the Belfast public



I should like to take this opportunity to thank the patrons of The Royal Hippodrome and the Belfast public in general for the wonderful support which they have given to me in connection with the various shows of this and a similar nature which I have promised for their enjoyment from time to time. As in the past, it will be my constant endeavour in the future to offer only the very best talent available, and I am pleased to be able to say that many outstanding Comedians and Vaudeville acts have been booked to appear at The Royal Hippodrome during 1943 and 1944, which will provide entertainment of the highest standard.

Thank you.

G. L. BIRCH

Page 4

**PROGRAMME**

"Juno and the Paycock"

INTERVAL

1. Peggy Dell and Band
2. Black and Richardson
3. Peggy Dell and Band
4. The Comerford Troupe
5. Morelli Bros. and Angelina
6. Band
7. Annette
8. The Merry Macs
9. The Doyle Twins
10. Peggy Dell and Band
11. Joseph McLaughlin
12. Will Duffy and Pearl
13. Peggy Dell and Band

**GOD SAVE THE KING**

Page 5

Page 6

CARL CLOPET PRODUCTIONS  
Presented by  
DIANA ROMNEY, ANN CLOET, RONALD IRBS,  
NOEL MORELLI, and WALTER MACKEN

SEAN O'CASEY'S  
**"JUNO and the PAYCOCK"**  
IN THREE ACTS

CHARACTERS

"Captain" Jack Boyle	Walter Macken
John Boyle, his wife	Ann Clety
Johnny Boyle, their	Neveils Peterson
May Boyle, children	Maura Kerley
"Juno" Doyle	Noel Percell
Miss Marie McLaughlin	Diana Romney
"Neddy" Nugent, a soldier	Maurice Selwyn
Miss Tansley	Shelia Maguire
Harry Dalton	Stephen Brennan
Charles Roschke, a schoolteacher	Ronald Irbs
Mr. Joseph McLaughlin	Joseph Nolan
James Brennan, Michael	Michael Murphy
Mr. Eustace Vander	Patrick Davlin
A young woman, Mrs.	John Hardy
A young woman, Mrs.	Geoff Rowley
The Nightingales	Donal McLaughlin
	Maurice Halligan

THE PLAY PRODUCED BY CARL F. CLOPET

Page 7

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

ACT I  
The living-room of a tenement-strategy of the Boyle family, in a tenement house in Dublin.

ACT II  
The same.

ACT III  
The same.

A few days elapse between Acts I and II, and two months between Acts II and III.

During Act III the curtain is lowered for a few minutes to denote the lapse of one hour.

Period of the play 1917.

Decorations by Jane Carroll

STAGE MANAGER (FOR CLOPET PRODUCTIONS) STEPHEN BRENNAN  
STAGE MANAGER (FOR CLOPET PRODUCTIONS) JAMES MACKEN  
STAGE MANAGER (FOR CLOPET PRODUCTIONS) JAMES MACKEN

## Appendix 2.4

Review of *Dalladh Airgid*, Connacht Tribune, 3 January 1948, page 5.

# Riot of Fun at Taibhdhearc

There are quite a number of people in Galway who in their last glimpse of Mr. Walter Macken before his departure next week for Dublin will see him armed with a heavy axe making a fierce dash at a number of frightened people. These who have already seen him thus are those who attended the riot of fun that he presented at Taibhdhearc, on Thursday night, the first of a four nights' run of his own translation to Irish of the rollicking comedy, "Tons of Money," by Will Evans and Valentine.

Mr. Macken seems to have put a special kick into this last performance in the Taibhdhearc. He will leave Galway next week to settle down in Dublin where he will become a member of the Abbey Theatre Company and devote a considerable amount of his time to play and novel writing.

Although there was grand balance in the group that went on the stage in "Tons of Money" and although there was no fatness at the time Mr. Macken rose high above the others not merely by reason of that fact that in the role of Aubrey he had a part that gave him freedom of movement but by reason of his delightful treatment of the nincompoop Aubrey and his portrayal of the minister and the dashing Anglo-Mexican as Aubrey would see those characters.

Miss Nancy Lee fitted herself very snugly into the character of Miss Mullett to give a grand little performance while Seamus Walsh and Brendan O'Riordain also gave competent performances. Michael Kelly found his style cramped in the role of the lawyer. Although sound in his part he was one of those who made the play a pleasant affair. Mrs. W. Macken proved a good foil for her husband all through the play and the only little weaknesses that arose sprang from a lack of confidence by newcomer Maire Ní Loinaigh and by Seamus O'Loideain. Others who took part were Imelda Donagh and Eamonn McDonachadha.

Production was by Mr. Macken and lighting by Mr. Tammis King.

## Appendix 2.5

*Charley's Aunt*, cast and set: The names in the cast list correspond to Picture 2.16 in the main text. The signatures at the foot of the page are from the back of the photograph.

P Jimin Seartai  
to Brendan Thomas  
15 - 26 March 1939  
[Part (1)]

1) In  $S_{T^2}$

2) der Set

3 o chlé - 1) Abhlín Ní Shuilleabháin } un English  
 2) Seán Ó Neachtáin }  
 3) Máire R. Ó Dothaigh }  
 4) Michael Ó Béaláin }  
 5) Seán Ó. Ó Sháin }  
 6) Michael Mac Conaolaigh }  
 7) Máire Ní Górváin }  
 8) Abhlín Ní Chéirín }



*Nyctemara* *Ephialtes*



## Appendix 2.6

This photograph is from an earlier production of *An Pósadh* by 'An Craoibhín Aoibhín'. It is from the NUIG collection and dated August 1940 which contradicts with the entry in the NUIG Booklet where the date is August 1939.

It is reproduced here to show some of the style and setting used for this production and this is likely to give some indication of the Taibhdhearc approach to the Gate Theatre production in November 1940.



T1/E/10: Aug 1940, Black and white photograph mounted on card of scene from *An Pósadh* by An Craoibhín, featuring: Micheál Ó Beirn, Eibhlín Ní Suilleabháin and Walter Macken.

## Appendix 2.7

### GATE THEATRE

(By arrangement with Hilton Edwards and Michael Mac Liammoir,  
Dublin Gate Productions, Ltd.)

### ΤΑΙΒΘΕΑΡΟ ΝΑ ΣΑΙΛΛΙΜΕ



Κατασπλεαδ: ΑΝ ΤΟΡ. Τ. ΒΡΕΑΤΗΑΔ.

Στιύρτόρπ:

Αν τ-Ολλαν Τ. Ηα Μυρέαδα, Αν τ-Ολλαν Σιλαν Ο Βπολέαν,

Λυζαδ Ο Θεαγυα, Τομάρ Ο Μάιλλε.

Λέιμγέεορ 7 Βανιρτεορ: ΒΔΙΤΕΑΡ Ο ΜΑΙΟΝ.

Ρύνατρε: ΜΑΙΡΕ ΝΙC ΣΙΟΛΛΑ ΜΑΡΤΑΝ.

---

ΤΙΑ CΕΑΤΔΑΟΙΗ, Ι3ΑΘ ΛΑ ΜΙ ΣΑΜΗΑ.

---

“FEAR AN CLÓCA.”

Le Loup L. D'Alcon. (distinghe as Quadae Toinin.)

## AN CLAR.

(DE RÉIR MAR A TÁSDAS SIADU ISTEAÓ).

John Mangan, dearbúrátaí an fíle ... ..	Séamur Ureacnaó.
Mick Fogarty, i na cónaí na rann "dorr-houpe" ... ..	Antómar Mac Eócaíó.
Bridie Gilheaney, bean a tise ...	Máire Nic Siolla Máirtain.
Marty Phelan, lóirteóir eile ... ..	Tomár Mac Coillte.
Con Colgan, lóirteóir eile ... ..	Báitéar Ó Laoir.
Cis Carmody ... ..	Eiblin Ni Súilleabháin.
Mangan, James Clarence, an fíle ... ..	Báitéar Ó Maicín.
James Mangan, átaí an fíle ... ..	Seán Mac Siolla Pádraic.
Kate Mangan, mátaí an fíle ... ..	Peis Ni Connig.
Catherine Hayes ... ..	Eiblin Ni Uíam.
Laurence Tighe, capa an fíle ... ..	Tomár Mac Coillte.
Blythe, capa eile ... ..	Antómar Mac Eócaíó.

## ÁIT AN DRÁMA

Shíon 1.—Seompa i "dorr houpe" i mBíro Street, Baile Átha Cliath.

Shíon 2.—Uíonstóir "opium."

Shíon 3.—An áit éadóina le Shíon 1.

Tráthóna Meán 1840.

BÁITÉAR Ó MAICÍN a léigís an Dráma.

Bairteóir Stáitre ... .. Dearbhúmar Ó Conéubair.  
As Cúiríú Uir ... .. Tomár Mac an Ríog.

## AN BUIÓCAN ÉÓIL

Specta Smith: 'Cello; Margaret Mac Namee: Piano.  
Popé Sheimey: Violin.



## Appendix 2.8

# TAIBÓEARC NA SAILLIÑE



Cheannchead: An Dhr. T. Dineen.  
 Scríobhadh: An t-Ollamh O. Ua Maicéad.  
 An t-Ollamh Cillian Ó Dineen.  
 Lothair Ó Deaíosa.  
 Comár ó Máille.  
 Léimseán 7  
 Dáimseán: Dáimseán Ó Maicín.

SAILLIÑE

Seán Uas Ó Casoy,

Cornnes,

Devon.

A CANA,

Saillínn, 30 / 10 / 42 194

4th Nov. 1942.

SP 2759

in your receipt

Early next month we will be producing your play "The Plough and the Stars", and I am writing to you for the necessary permission, not to produce it and for it's translation. It has been translated by our best translator, Duadhach Corbín, under the imposing title of "An Céadta is na Réalta". Please let us know the terms, if they are the same as those for "The Shadow of a Surrjan" or higher. On the other hand I would prefer if they were a little higher. We are up against it trying to feed drama in Irish to the Irish nation, the takings are never very imposing and a spirit of share takes up the small cheque we send you for your wonderful work.

Thanking you,

Yours sincerely,

Walter Macken.

(Producer)

Tingrith,  
Station Road;  
Totnes. S.Devon. Eng.

Nov.4th,1942.

Walter Macken, Esq.,  
Producer,  
Taibhchearc na Gaillimhe,  
Gaillimh.

Dear Walter Macken:

It was interesting to hear that you are going to do "The Plough and the Stars" in Irish. I hope it may be a success with you. I haven't the slightest idea what royalty was asked for, or given, on the performances of the Cummen. I daresay it was 5/- on the gross receipts. I don't see how I could ask more from the slender audiences the plays in Irish bring together. Say 17/- then, if you think the first too small. Anyway, in these days (and before them, for I'm never likely to make a even a tiny fortune out of what I write), with three chiselers, and things as they are, everything helps, my lad; so however wee the cheque may be, it will be welcomed with thanks.

I'm sure you're up against a big thing trying to get drama in Irish over to the people. Indeed, the work of Gaelicising Bire is, as we say in Dublin, a job and a half. They didn't go the right way about it from the start. They kept it too much of a respectable middle-class movement. All the tony persons swept into the Ard Craoth and the Meeting Branch of Dublin, and let the poorer branches go to hell. I remember proposing to the Dublin Coiste Ceantair - Sean. T. - in the chair - that all Gaelic Leaguers should be required to become members, and regularly attend, and help in every way, the Branch that worked in the district where they lived. That didn't go down. In the branch that I was attached to then - Bruncondra - the boys and girls of Hollybank Rd, St Alphonsus Rd, Home Farm Rd, and the like, went to these branches, and we hadn't one member from these tony localities in our Branch, save a President, F.J. Thunder, an old man of ninety-nine, who came once a year to say a cairde go leir..... I wrote an article in the Irish Peasant then edited by Iliam P.O'Maoin, about the whole question, a rambling article, but to the point; so much so that I was rebuked be no less a person than Mrs de Valera - then, of course, Sinead ni Flannagain. These two tony branches were top-heavy, and the rest dwindled away. That must be, at least, 30 years ago. Between ourselves, Hyde wasn't much of a leader. O'Hickey would have made a better one. Reading the Irish Press's Irish article daily, one hears all the old things said over and over again thirty years ago. Only the other day, a speaker, the G. League Tanaiste, I think, told his hearers that the Gaedhilge was the one shield between Christianity and Paganism. As a Catholic, that fellow is very close to the sin of despair. An me just after reading in a Catholic Journal that each Sacrament has an Archangel to take care of it! I'd love to have a chat with you.

Ever Yours,

*Sean O'Casey*

## Appendix 2.9

Bonus approved by the board of Taibhdhearc na Gaillimhe for salaried staff in 1939 and 1946 (from the Board minutes)

From Board minutes of the 21 December 1939

(2) Maidir le Bapo Brian Ó Scailín, Coirneadóir  
a éirí ar aile iuz an bheadaí nua.

(3) Coirneadóir bonus i gcoir an nodlaí a cábaire  
don mór oibre nua leanaí:-  
Báirear Ó Maicín £3.0.0  
Tomás Mac an Ríóí £2.0.0  
Brian Ó Scailín £2.0.0  
Maicín Mac an Ríóí £2.0.0

From Board minutes of the 01 July 1946

3. Coirneadóir bonus bliantúil do  
cábaire do oibritheoirí na Taibhdhearc  
nua seo leanaí:-  
Báirear Ó Maicín:- £20.0.0  
Tomás Mac an Ríóí:- £10.0.0  
Maicín Mac an Ríóí:- £10.0.0.

4. Coirneadóir go n-éirí an nolla dúnca  
i gcoir oibre a péad nua tuit.

Donncha Mac an Ríóí  
31/8/46.



# Appendix 2.10

## ТАЙӨӨАRС НА ГАИЛМЕ *Shushy* *El Hadya*



Сүзүн: - Саилм 204.

Сүзүн: Ан т-Оуан Д. та Мүрөтс.  
Сүзүн: Ан т-Оуан С. О. Дюлсүн,  
Ан Сеансуп Л. О. Дюлсүн,  
Ан Др. Томар О. Милле,  
Ан Сеансуп С. О. Консуп,  
Ан Мак Дюлсүн.  
Сүзүн: Дюлсүн О. Милле,  
Рунат: фее III Матсана.

*2 whitehand*  
*white*  
Саилм, Thursday Sept 11 1947.

Dear Dick,

Thanks a lot for the article  
you letter of today.

The article is good and pleased  
very much even if it is a shade  
flattering, but then which of us can  
find who is not a sucker for  
nice sayings - if they are about us.

The novel is not out yet - hopes  
see it in December as you were  
notice from enclosed letter. At  
moment Macmillans are negotiating  
with New York publishers who are  
interested in bringing it out in  
America. I have signed a 6 year  
contract for the production of books  
in Flemish in Holland and Belgium.  
It would be fun to hear what

make of the Gaiety accent in law  
 I have been watching Went's adverts  
 we met you for news of Patricia.  
 Glad to hear she will be app-  
 soon. It's great that your career  
 is going so well in America. It  
 deserves success, and everybody  
 knows about him - mainly. I am  
 it momentarily and quote him all  
 the place.

The Tabldance proceeds. We will  
 be opening next month with a revival of  
 Malher's "Bourgeois" and have "Lefevre"  
 Euripides and Henry IV of Shakespeare  
 the mat for the season with Benecore  
 "Anah. no. payo" and a few others panned  
 in. We started a season ticket selling for  
 this year and it is proving very suc-  
 cessful. <sup>Prink</sup> All the <sup>Prink</sup> citizens are sympathetic and  
 becoming members - so we are almost as  
 of good houses for all our plays - in  
 hope - because as you know a theatre  
 mainly exists on hope and people  
 I was in Dublin for a few days about  
 the Omeiros Drama but I rushed it as  
 didn't manage to get out to you. Next  
 to can't wait.

Thanking you again for the nice letter  
 and hoping we will  
 see you in the near future.  
 Yours  
 W. C. C. C.

**Appendix 2.11**  
Minutes of the Taibhdhearc Board meeting,  
For 15 November 1947

Creannán an an 15/11/47.

• Lárair léi ÷  
an zollam Ua Múrcóda  
an Ceannrónaí Seán Ó Cúinbáin  
aod Ua Dubáin.  
an zollam C. Ó Brocháin

y b. Thairín.

- ① léigead' munnzuainseí an éinninnizie deise  
agus. glaciad' leo.
- ② ~~Socnuigead'~~ léigead' leirín Ó Cimpáras  
Amundlainne na Zaulze ó Ráo' zo mba  
mair leo "Sead" seo, do déanam san  
Zukidiane. Socnuigead' leirín do einn cinea  
ó Ráo' zo mbead' fáilte Rómpa y zo  
raib' na Szuínzeaini sádra an halla do  
zabáinz dáb' in aisea, aibléas saora,  
sezzannai ynl.
- ③ Socnuigead' na haisteaini do b' páinne  
in "Ara-na-pōz" d'íoc.  
Az éirige as léirín an Dráma seo,  
Rinne an zollam Ó Brocháin casaid fasin  
léirín seo - agus "le Bourgeois Gentilhomme",  
Dubáin an zollam Ó Múrcóda zua conzabáirise  
Dráma mar "Ara-na-pōz" do léirín ai  
sa mbealai do scriob' an z-údar é.  
Níon auzuz bázéara Thairín le casaid  
an zollam Ua Brocháin

~~Socnuigead'~~ Ua Múrcóda  
22/11/47.



Minutes of the Taibhdhearc Board meeting,  
For 22 November 1947

Cruinniú ar an 22/11/47.

1. Lúthraí b'—

an 2-úllamh Ula Múinteoir.  
Doó Mac Dubháin,  
an 2-úllamh Cilián Ó Bnalcáin  
Lúthraí Ó Deirgáin

7 buiréar Dhuairín.

- (1) Lúthraí mion-rúnsaí an cruinniú deire 7 glaoil le.
- (2) Lúthraí leirín a'n Gúmáin fíanna fáil  
az iarrad an halla ó fáil le cruinniú  
an an 6 a Nollag. Soimízeó seomó  
a aó 30 mbeó fíis Ceol an fíoise  
an subail an 16 sin, agus fíis fíoise  
an halla ó fáil ai an dárú eib.
- (3) Lúthraí leirín an Chamber of Commerce.  
az iarrad an mbeó se an cínas  
7a sziúriónaí comairle an b' ó c'istíne  
Dáib fíis a' zéirí se: — "The Chamber of  
Commerce seeks the cooperation of its members  
to encourage & popularise as far as possible  
the speaking of the language in their various  
businesses: *Cumadó an cúl mairéarín a' b' leirín.*"
- (3) an mbeó a' b' fíis Dubháin agus an comairle  
na sziúriónaí ~~comairle~~ an soimízeó fíis  
Mac Zolla Ceoláir, do cur an iarrad  
sziúriónaí (fí), an fíis fíis, agus 30  
zearpáin an iarrad ó an 1/1/48.

*Dianmáthla Múinteoir*

17/12/47

## Appendix 2.12

The Connacht Sentinel, 16 December 1947, page 2

Note: Head-line cropped and should read 'Taibhdhearc Producer's Work'

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 16, 1947

# Taibhdhearc Producer's for Drama in Irish and English

THE resignation of Mr. Walter Macken from his position as manager-producer of Taibhdhearc na Gaillimhe, which undoubtedly presents a serious problem to the directors of the Taibhdhearc who must somehow replace him, focusses attention on a brilliant young Galwayman whose knowledge of things dramatic is unusually detailed. He has, in addition, always been a close observer and a keen student of character—qualities which are bound to be of importance in the literary work to which he is now going to devote most of his time.

Mr. Macken joined the Taibhdhearc as an actor at the age of 17. He married Miss Peggy Kenny, B.A., and at the age of 21 went to work in London. Two years later, in 1939, he returned to take up the position of producer in the Taibhdhearc; his immediate predecessor, Mr. Frank Dermody, left Galway at that time to take up appointment as producer in the Abbey Theatre. Since then he has produced 76 plays, six pantomimes and various sketches, verse recitals, etc. His productions included a few of his own plays.

★

His first play, "An Caillin Aimsire Abn," was presented in the Taibhdhearc in 1943, and soon afterwards it was published by An Gúm. It was reproduced in 1946. His next play, "Oighreacht Na Mara," a play dealing with the lives of the

Claddagh fishermen and their families, was produced in the Taibhdhearc in 1944. One of the actors in that production, Mr. Seán McClory, is now under contract to RKO in Hollywood. Mr. Macken produced this play in the Abbey Theatre in the following year. The book was published by Mr. Desmond Kenny, B.A., The Book Shop, Galway. "An Fear Ó'n Spidéal," Mr. Macken's third play, was produced in the Taibhdhearc in 1945.

These three plays, referred to as first, second and third in order of appearance, could not be so numbered if one were to include Mr. Macken's various short sketches which were put on the Taibhdhearc stage on and off during recent years. He was a much more prolific writer than the mere naming of his principal works would suggest.

★

Mr. Macken turned his attention to English drama in 1945 when he wrote "Mungo's Mansion." This play, which deals with a Galway clan family in fortune and tragedy, was successfully produced in the Abbey Theatre in February, 1946. After winning acclaim in Dublin it was

put on in London—in February, 1946—and everything seemed set for a successful run when the great blizzard swept Britain and practically closed down Britain's theatreland.

This play was only a short time in the hands of the publishers, Macmillans, when he presented them with the manuscript of his first novel, "Quench The Moon," which he completed in 1946. This book is to be published by Macmillans in April next, and about the same time it will be published in America by the Viking Press, who have secured the American publication rights.

There has recently been a revived interest in "Mungo's Mansion." It





is to be produced in Australia and possibly in America, and a Dutch theatrical group have bought the rights for its production in Holland.

Mr. Macken has recently written a new play which he has titled, "Vacant Possession" and which is scheduled to be published by Macmillans. This is a comedy based on life in Galway.

**His final production in the Taibhdhears will be a revival of "Dalladh Airgid" ("Tons Of Money") which will be presented on January 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th.**



As a producer Mr. Macken has given splendid service to the Irish theatrical movement. He gives to his productions a freshness of approach, sparks of his own individuality, and the result is generally something more intriguing than is found in most theatres. As an actor he has given many memorable performances in the Taibhdhears and has displayed a remarkable versatility. He can sparkle in comedy, play blood-red heroes in the plays that demand that kind of stuff, and he can carry over to his audience the mood of the tragic notes.

When asked what was his outstanding memory of the Taibhdhears he said it was the wonderful work performed by the hundreds of actors and actresses who went through the Theatre, their devotion and affection for the Taibhdhears, and the slavery they endured without any hope of financial reward.

"In my opinion," Mr. Macken added, "that is the spirit that has kept the Taibhdhears alive for twenty years and will keep it progressing until it produces a true, native Irish drama."

The Taibhdhears, he said, had sent actors and technicians to many parts of Ireland and even to many countries. The proof of the idealistic success of the Taibhdhears lay in the fact that none of those actors would ever forget the Taibhdhears; they would always remember it with affection and nostalgia.

He likes best to recall the production of Shakespearean plays, notably "Twelfth Night," "Hamlet," "The Merchant of Venice" by Eugene O'Neill and "Mary Rose" by J. M. Barrie. The latter play was translated into Irish by Seánán Ní Chongáil, who has since made a big name for herself in British films.

### Appendix 2.13

Minutes of the Board meeting of Taibhdhearc na Gaillimhe  
held on 17 December 1947

Láimne sa mh 17-12-1947

1. Léice bí -

An r. Ollain D. Ua Muccada  
An Beannpoar S. Ó Conchubair  
Do Mac Dubáin  
An r. Ollain C. Ó Brocháin  
An Dr. Tomás Ó Múille  
Báireas Ó Márcáin

7 mairt Nic Shasana

1. Léigeas mion-euariceí an éinneite  
deire 7 glaca leo.
2. Mairt leis an leir ó Báireas Ó  
Márcáin, a' rad go raib sé ag meif  
as a post mar bairneoir-léigeas  
do glac na scúlaí leir. Dubáin  
Báireas Ó Márcáin fé. seo go raib  
brón air gur "folligeas" an scéal  
na na péiréirí roim an éinneite  
a' nac air a' bí an léir.
3. Rinneas díospóireas p'p' post do  
Wond, 7 se in glac drámaí abí  
socrúige 7 zóir an r. Séasúra. ad  
Do Mac Dubáin an dráma "Préine"  
do cur sa 7 "Náinad don Póbal"  
do cur ina ionad Mí Feabes.  
Cuideig an r. Ollain C. Brocháin  
leir an rún seo, 7 h. socrúigead leir.  
La molaí an r. Ollain Ua Muccada  
socrúigead "Dáimseoir" sealaí  
do tabairt iseaí socrúigead cuir

do d'andain go sealadaic se da parr  
sa z-seacinaim. Socunigeas go gwerfod  
su z-llain O Doliain seaz uel parr.

Rinnead d'osporeaz pen tpose nar  
k'uriziceon seacinaic do t'omad 7  
dubrad zua cor se an pose d'p'oisin  
ms na d'p'ep'ei se bez weestasi,  
7 nae n'laepad enne sa pose go  
dei m'e lud.

Rinnead d'osporeaz pen k'uriziceon  
s k'uricead "n'inaid don Pobal  
m'e p'atca 7 p'egad pe an k'ollain  
ua m'uricaia labar le p'onnin  
D'ideaus se an n'grian p'ecan.  
s'k' p'edre Jarod O p'ocian d'p'ub.

4. Socunigeas p'ead uniceaca to cubar  
do k'uricead O m'acn se an cu  
le d' l'endak

5. Socunigeas beaus Morlag do tubar  
don lucr s'bar nar z'nae.

diarmuidalla Muriceon

20/12/47

## Appendix 2.14: Taibhdhearc na Gaillimhe plays 1938 to 1948 (Bateman, 2003) <sup>34b</sup>

### 10 DEIREADH FÓMHAIR

*Ag an Am Sin* le Séamus de Bhilmot, léirithe ag Proinnsias Mac Diarmada.

### 7 – 9 SAMHAIN

*Fear na Sainnte (L'Avare)* le Molière, aistrithe ag M Ní Dhábhóirean, léirithe ag Proinnsias Mac Diarmada.

### 16 – 19 NOLLAIG

*Súgradh na mBláth* le Micheál Eóin Ó Súilleabháin, léirithe ag Proinnsias Mac Diarmada.

## 1938

### 30 Eanáir – 2 Feabhra

*Níl Grádh Níos Mó* le Séamus de Bhilmot, léirithe ag Proinnsias Mac Diarmada.

### 19 – 22 Bealtaine

*Coriolanus* le William Shakespeare, aistrithe ag Liam Ó Briain, léirithe ag Proinnsias Mac Diarmada.

### 26 – 31 Deireadh Fómhair

*Éiric Fhuilteach* le Diarmaid Ó Murchadha, aistrithe ag Tomás Ó Raghallaigh, léirithe ag Proinnsias Mac Diarmada.

### 2 – 4 Nollaig

*San Proinnsias agus an Mactre (St. Francis and the Wolf)* le Paul Vincent Carroll, aistrithe ag Seán Ó Neachtain, léirithe ag Máire Ní Giolla Mhártain.

### 2 – 4 Nollaig

*Cor in Aghaidh an Chaim* le Micheál Breathnach, léirithe ag Tomás Ó hÉaluighthe agus Diarmaid Ó Murchadha.

## 1939

### 1 Eanáir

*Réalt Chríosta* le M H Mac Garmhna OP, aistrithe ag Seán Ó Neachtain, léirithe ag Diarmaid Ó Murchadha.

### 2 – 5 Feabhra

*Tóraidheacht an Ghiolla Deacair* le Diarmaid Ó Murchadha agus Seán Ó Neachtain, léirithe ag Tomás Ó hÉaluighthe.

### 20 – 23 Aibreán

*Clann na Gealaighe (Children of the Moon)* le Martin Flavin, aistrithe ag Leon Ó Broin, léirithe ag Diarmaid Ó Murchadha.

### 20 – 21 Bealtaine

*Misneach* le Annraí Saidléir, léirithe ag Domhnall Ó Colchún.

### 20 – 21 Bealtaine

*Slis den tSean Maide* le Seán Mac Thorcail, léirithe ag Brigid Ní Loideáin.

### 15 – 18 Meitheamh

*Aintín Searlaí (Charley's Aunt)* le Brandon Thomas, aistrithe ag Seán Ó Neachtain, léirithe ag Bháitéar Ó Maicín.

### 30 Lúnasa

*An Pósadh* leis "An Craoibhín", léirithe ag Bháitéar Ó Maicín.

### 30 Lúnasa

*Teach na mBocht* leis "An Craoibhín", léirithe ag Bháitéar Ó Maicín.

### 30 Lúnasa

*An Cleamhnas* leis "An Craoibhín", léirithe ag Bháitéar Ó Maicín.

### 22 – 29 Deireadh Fómhair

*Síol Combraic (Dragon's Teeth)* le Diarmaid Ó Murchadha, aistrithe ag Tomás Ó Máille, léirithe ag Bháitéar Ó Maicín.

### 23 – 26 Samhain

*Tart* le Micheál Breathnach, léirithe ag Bháitéar Ó Maicín.

### 23 – 26 Samhain

*Íodhbhairt* le Micheál Breathnach, léirithe ag Bháitéar Ó Maicín.

### 23 – 26 Samhain

*Briseann an Dúchas* le Micheál Breathnach, léirithe ag Bháitéar Ó Maicín.

## 1940

### 7, 11 agus 14 Eanáir

*An Chailleach Fhiosrach* le Diarmaid Ó Murchadha agus Seán Ó Neachtain, léirithe ag Bháitéar Ó Maicín.

### 14 – 17 Márta

*Ag Seasamb an Fhóid (Facing the Music)* le J H Darnley, aistrithe ag Seán Ó Neachtain, léirithe ag Bháitéar Ó Maicín.

### 16 – 19 Bealtaine

*Scáil an Óglaigh (The Shadow of a Gunman)* le Seán O'Casey, aistrithe ag P Ó Féinneadha, léirithe ag Bháitéar Ó Maicín.

### 16 – 19 Bealtaine

*Earráid* le T S Ó Máille, léirithe ag Bháitéar Ó Maicín.

20 – 23 MEITHEAMH

*Lapa an Apa (The Monkey's Paw)* le W W Jacobs, aistrithe ag Leon Ó Broin, léirithe ag Bháitéar Ó Maicín.

20 – 23 MEITHEAMH

*Éirighe na Gealaighe (The Rising of the Moon)* le Lady Gregory, aistrithe ag Seán Mac Giollarnáth, léirithe ag Bháitéar Ó Maicín.

20 – 23 MEITHEAMH

*An Fear Siubhail (The Travelling Man)* le Lady Gregory, aistrithe ag Buadhach Tóibín, léirithe ag Bháitéar Ó Maicín.

12 – 15 MEÁN FÓMHAIR

*Fear an Chlóca (The Man in the Cloak)* le Louis D'Alton, aistrithe ag Buadhach Tóibín, léirithe ag Bháitéar Ó Maicín.

24 – 27 DEIREADH FÓMHAIR

*Deireadh an Aistir (Journey's End)* le R C Sherriff, aistrithe ag Aodh Mac Dhubháin, léirithe ag Bháitéar Ó Maicín.

10 SAMHAIN

*Casadh an tSugáin* leis "An Craobhín", léirithe ag Bháitéar Ó Maicín.

10 SAMHAIN

*Teach na mBocht* le Lady Gregory, léirithe ag Bháitéar Ó Maicín.

10 SAMHAIN

*An Pósadh* leis "An Craobhín", léirithe ag Bháitéar Ó Maicín.

11 SAMHAIN

*Scáil an Óglaigh* le Seán O'Casey, aistrithe ag P Ó Feinneadha, léirithe ag Bháitéar Ó Maicín.

11 SAMHAIN

*Lapa an Apa* le W W Jacobs, aistrithe ag Leon Ó Broin, léirithe ag Bháitéar Ó Maicín.

12 SAMHAIN

*Deireadh an Aistir (Journey's End)* le R C Sherriff, aistrithe ag Aodh Mac Dhubháin, léirithe ag Bháitéar Ó Maicín.

13 SAMHAIN

*Fear an Chlóca (The Man in the Cloak)* le Louis D'Alton, aistrithe ag Buadhach Tóibín, léirithe ag Bháitéar Ó Maicín.

## 1941

9 - 16 FEABHRA

*An Postaire Fánach* le Diarmaid Ó Murchadha le cúnaimh ó Sheán MacRéamoinn agus Tomás Mac Coillte, léirithe ag Bháitéar Ó Maicín.

16 – 18 MÁRTA

*Caithréim an Sclábhaidhe* le Bháitéar Ó Maicín agus Tomás Ó Máille, léirithe ag Bháitéar Ó Maicín.

1 – 4 BEALTAINÉ

*Dalladh Airgid (Tons of Money)* le Evans and Valentine, aistrithe ag Buadhach Tóibín, léirithe ag Bháitéar Ó Maicín.

26 – 29 MEITHEAMH

*An Sgiúrsa Bhán (The Power and the Glory)* le Karel Capek, aistrithe ag Buadhach Tóibín, léirithe ag Bháitéar Ó Maicín.

25 – 28 MEÁN FÓMHAIR

*An tImpire Mac Seoin (The Emperor Jones)* le Eugene O'Neill, aistrithe ag Buadhach Tóibín, léirithe ag Bháitéar Ó Maicín.

16 – 23 SAMHAIN

*Macbeith* le William Shakespeare, aistrithe ag S L Ó Súilleabháin, léirithe ag Bháitéar Ó Maicín.

26 – 29 NOLLAIG

*Scáil an Óglaigh (Shadow of a Gunman)* le Seán O'Casey, aistrithe ag P Ó Feinneadha, léirithe ag Bháitéar Ó Maicín.

26 – 29 NOLLAIG

*Tabhartas an Bháis* le D Ó M agus E Ó C, léirithe ag Bháitéar Ó Maicín.

## 1942

5 – 8 FEABHRA

*An Grádh Cásbhar (Le Dépit Amoureux)* le Molière, aistrithe ag Liam Ó Briain, léirithe ag Bháitéar Ó Maicín.

5 – 8 FEABHRA

*An Fear Óg as Ráth Maonais* le Michael Brennan, aistrithe ag Tadhg S Seoighe, léirithe ag Bháitéar Ó Maicín.

15 – 22 MÁRTA

*Rúille Búille* – a pot-pourri, scríofa agus léirithe ag Bháitéar Ó Maicín.

11 – 14 MEITHEAMH

*Déamar agus a Bhean* le Séamus de Bhilmot, léirithe ag Bháitéar Ó Maicín.

11 – 14 MEITHEAMH

*An Ráidhteas Oifigeambail* le Séamus de Bhilmot, léirithe ag Bháitéar Ó Maicín.

17 – 20 MEÁN FÓMHAIR

*Mary Rose* le J M Barrie, aistrithe ag Siúbhán Nic Cionnaith, léirithe ag Bháitéar Ó Maicín.

27 MEÁN FÓMHAIR

*An Maor Nua* agus cuirim cheoil, léirithe ag Bháitéar Ó Maicín.

5 – 8 SAMHAIN

*An Céachta agus na Réalta (The Plough and the Stars)* le Seán O'Casey, aistrithe ag Buadhach Tóibín, léirithe ag Bháitéar Ó Maicín.

15 SAMHAIN

*Cuirim Cheoil* le Bháitéar Ó Maicín.

29 SAMHAIN

*An Bheirt Dbearbhráthar* le Tomás Ó Raghallaigh; *An Fear Céile* le Liam Mac a Bhaire; *Eachtra Crainn Tabhaill* le Tadhg Ó Súilleabháin; *Teine sa Dorcbadas* le Seán Ó Fathaigh; *Mo Pheacadh* le Seóirse Mac Thomáis agus *An Triúr Neacht* le Pádraic Mac Donnchadha, go léir léirithe ag Bháitéar Ó Maicín.

17 – 20 NOLLAIG

*An Chnáb (Rope)* le Patrick Hamilton, aistrithe ag Colm Ó Ciarghusa, léirithe ag Bháitéar Ó Maicín.

27 NOLLAIG

*An Geall* le D Ó Tuathchair agus Cuirim Cheoil.

1943

7 Eanáir

*An Mforbhúilt* le Éamonn Ó Giobaláin; *An Margadh Dubh* le Micheál Ó Briain; *Timpist Cogaidh* le S Ó Súilleabháin, *Combacht an Ghrádha* le Liam Mac Aodha, *Mise Duine Aca* le Micheál Ó Créatháin agus *An Geall* le D Ó Tuathchair, go léir léirithe ag Bháitéar Ó Maicín.

14 – 21 FEABHRA

*An Curadh Mhór (Red Branch Nights)* - geamaireacht le Diarmaid Ó Murchadha agus Seán Mac Réamoinn, léirithe ag Bháitéar Ó Maicín.

25 – 28 MÁRTA

*Fás agus Feochadh* le Seán Ó Conchubhair, léirithe ag Bháitéar Ó Maicín.

20 – 23 BEALTAINÉ

*An Chóirín v An Ceallach (Trial at Green Street Courthouse)* le Roger McHugh, aistrithe ag Seán Mac Réamoinn, léirithe ag Bháitéar Ó Maicín.

24 – 27 MEITHEAMH

*An Casán Garbh (The Rugged Path)* le George Sheils, aistrithe ag Micheál d'Andún, léirithe ag Bháitéar Ó Maicín.

16 – 19 MEÁN FÓMHAIR

*An Cailín Aimsire Abú* scríofa agus léirithe ag Bháitéar Ó Maicín.

17 DEIREADH FÓMHAIR

*Bbí Mac Agam Tráth* scríofa agus léirithe ag Bháitéar Ó Maicín – Litheas Órga Chonradh na Gaeilge.

18 – 21 SAMHAIN

*Feisteas Geimhridh (Winter Set)* le Maxwell Anderson, aistrithe ag Cáit Nic Aodh, léirithe ag Bháitéar Ó Maicín.

26 – 29 NOLLAIG

*An tUghdár i nGleic* le Labhrás Mac Brádaigh, léirithe ag Bháitéar Ó Maicín.

1944

13 – 20 FEABHRA

*Forfás Ghaedbeal* - geamaireacht, le Diarmaid Ó Murchadha agus Seán Mac Réamoinn, léirithe ag Bháitéar Ó Maicín.

30 MÁRTA – 2 AIBREÁN

*Mise an Méire* le Tomás Ó Máille, léirithe ag Bháitéar Ó Maicín.

11 – 14 BEALTAINÉ

*An Stoirm* le Alexandre Ostrovsky, aistrithe ag Aodh Mac Dhubbáin, léirithe ag Bháitéar Ó Maicín.

22 – 25 MEITHEAMH, 8 IÚIL, 6

LÚNASA

*Oigbreacht na Mara* le Bháitéar Ó Maicín, léirithe ag Bháitéar Ó Maicín.

9 – 12 SAMHAIN

*An Íodhbairt sa nGleann* le Tomás Ó hEaluighthe, léirithe ag Bháitéar Ó Maicín.

28 – 31 NOLLAIG

*T'Athair Dúis (Thy Dear Father)* le Gerard Healy, aistrithe ag Lasairfhiona Ní Mháille, léirithe ag Bháitéar Ó Maicín.

## 1945

11 – 18 FEABHRA

*Cupán Tae Airt* - gearnaireacht, le Diarmaid Ó Murchadha agus Lasairfhiona Ní Mháille, léirithe ag Bháitéar Ó Maicín.

22 – 25 MÁRTA

*Aicsean San Ósta* le Tomás Ó Máille, léirithe ag Bháitéar Ó Maicín.

10 – 13 BEALTAINÉ

*An tUatbhás (The Terror)* le Edgar Wallace, aistrithe ag Lasairfhiona Ní Mháille, léirithe ag Bháitéar Ó Maicín.

26 – 27 BEALTAINÉ

*Oigbreacht na Mara* le Bháitéar Ó Maicín, léirithe ag Bháitéar Ó Maicín, san Abbey.

25 IÚIL

*An Cruinniu* le S Ó Tallamhann, léirithe ag Bháitéar Ó Maicín.

25 IÚIL

*Sul ar eirigh muid Gallda* le A Ní Eigearthaigh, léirithe ag Bháitéar Ó Maicín.

26 – 29 IÚIL

*An Fear Ón Spídeal* le Bháitéar Ó Maicín, léirithe ag Bháitéar Ó Maicín.

18 MEÁN FÓMHAIR

*Commrádh Thomáis Dalbbís* léirithe ag Bháitéar Ó Maicín.

27 – 30 MEÁN FÓMHAIR

*Giolla an tSolais* le Mairéad Ní Ghrádaigh, léirithe ag Bháitéar Ó Maicín.

15 – 18 SAMHAIN

*Oidhche Chinn (Twelfth Night)* le William Shakespeare, aistrithe ag Bhera Nic Sleoinín, léirithe ag Bháitéar Ó Maicín.

27 – 30 NOLLAIG

*Oidhche Mhairt agat a Mhic Uí Dhomhnaill* le Robert Brennan, aistrithe ag Liam Ó Briain, léirithe ag Bháitéar Ó Maicín.

## 1946

22 – 24 FEABHRA

*Cúirt an Ghrá* - gearnaireacht, le Diarmaid Ó Murchadha agus Lasairfhiona Ní Mháille, léirithe ag Bháitéar Ó Maicín.

25 – 28 AIBREÁN

*Dramaidbeacht in Inis (Drama at Inish)* le Lennox Robinson, aistrithe ag Gearóid Mac Spealáin, léirithe ag Bháitéar Ó Maicín.

20 – 23 MEITHEAMH

*Cathal Buidhe* le Eibhlín Ní Bhaoighill, léirithe ag Bháitéar Ó Maicín.

5 – 8 MEÁN FÓMHAIR

*Scáth agus Ambhbaoín (Shadow and Substance)* le Paul Vincent Carroll, aistrithe ag Micheál d'Andún, léirithe ag Bháitéar Ó Maicín.

3 – 6 DEIREADH FÓMHAIR

*An Cailín Aimsire Abú* le Bháitéar Ó Maicín, léirithe ag Bháitéar Ó Maicín.

7 – 10 SAMHAIN

*Saidhbhbreas Gan Sonas (The Money Doesn't Matter)* le Louis D'Alton, aistrithe ag Micheál d'Andún, léirithe ag Bháitéar Ó Maicín.

15 SAMHAIN

*Cathal Buidhe* (raidió).

5 – 8 NOLLAIG

*Cinneambain (Of Mice and Men)* le John Steinbeck, aistrithe ag Aodh Mac Dhubháin, léirithe ag Bháitéar Ó Maicín.

## 1947

2 – 5 EANAIR

*Mise an Méire* - gearnaireacht le Tomás Ó Máille, léirithe ag Bháitéar Ó Maicín.

6 – 9 FEABHRA

*Na Fearachóin* le Gearóid Ó Lochlainn, léirithe ag Bháitéar Ó Maicín.

17 MÁRTA

*Muintir na hÉireann*, meascán le Bháitéar Ó Maicín, léirithe ag Bháitéar Ó Maicín.

20 – 21 AIBREÁN

*Ordóigin* le Henri Ghéon, aistrithe ag Liam Ó Briain, léirithe ag Bháitéar Ó Maicín.

8 – 11 BEALTAINÉ

*Ídri Chún Buadha (She Stoops to Conquer)* le Oliver Goldsmith, aistrithe ag Piaras Béaslai, léirithe ag Bháitéar Ó Maicín.

12 – 15 MEITHEAMH

*An tIúdach Pólach* le Erckmann-Chatrian, aistrithe ag Maighréad Nic Mhaicín, léirithe ag Bháitéar Ó Maicín.

2 – 5 DEIREADH FÓMHAIR

*An Geacach Duine Uasal (Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme)* le Molière, aistrithe ag Máire Ní Shíthe, léirithe ag Bháitéar Ó Maicín.

6 – 9 SAMHAIN

*Ara-na-Póg* le Dion Boucicault, aistrithe agus léirithe ag Bháitéar Ó Maicín.

## 1948

1 – 4 EANAIR

*Dalladh Airgid (Tons of Money)* le Evans and Valentine, aistrithe agus léirithe ag Bháitéar Ó Maicín.

12 – 15 FEABHRA

*Nambaid Don Phobal (En Folkefiende)* le Henrik Ibsen, aistrithe ag Gearóid Ó Lochlainn, léirithe ag Ian Priestly-Mitchell.

17 MÁRTA

*Aireagal Teach na mBocht (The Workhouse Ward)* le Lady Gragory, aistrithe ag Aodh Mac Dhubháin, léirithe ag Diarmaid Ó Murchadha. *Éirge na Gealaighe (The Rising of the Moon)* le Lady Gregory, aistrithe ag Seán Mac Giollamáth, léirithe ag Diarmaid Ó Murchadha.



## Appendix 2.15

### Conversations with former Taibhdhearc actors

#### 1. Éamonn Mach Dhonnchadha (Eamon McDonagh) b. 1926

The McDonagh's were shopkeepers and had a general grocery shop in Sea Road, Galway. Eamon worked at the shop before being employed by Thomas McDonagh and later by McDonagh Milling and Trading.

Among the plays that Éamonn performed in were:

1946 *Cúirt an Ghrá* le Diarmuid Ó Murchadha & Lasairfhiona Ní Mháille, 22-24 Feb\*

*Drama at Inish* by Lennox Robinson, 25-28 April

*Cathal Buidhe* by Eibhlin Ní Bhaoighill, 20-23 June \*\*

**Picture 2.38**



*Shadow and Substance* by Paul Vincent Carroll, 5-8 September 1946  
[L to R: Bháitéar Ó Maicín, Leabhrás Mac Giolla Coinnigh, Éamonn Mac Donnchadha, Peig, Bean Uí Maicín Dómhnaíl Ó Riordáin, Séamus Breathnach, Íde Ní Mathúna]

*The Money doesn't Matter* by Louis D'Alton, 7-10 November  
*Of Mice and Men* by John Steinbeck, 5-8 December

1947 *Mise an Méire* le Tomás Ó Máille, 2-5 January\*  
*Na Fearachoin* le Gearóid Ó Lochlainn, 6-9 February  
*Muintir na hÉireann* le Bháitéar Ó Maicín, 17 March\*\*\*  
*She Stoops to Conquer* by Oliver Goldsmith, 8-11 May  
*An t-Iúdach Pólach* by Erckmann- Chatrian, 12-15 June  
*Ara-na Póg* le Dion Boucicault, 6-9 November

1948 *Tons of Money* by Evans and Valentine, 1-4 January  
*En Folkefiende* by Henrik Ibsen, 12-15 February  
Seachain an Dathaóireactj le René Fauchois, 6-9 May  
*An tÉan Príosúin* le George Shiels, 14-17 October

1949 *Saoire an Bháis* le Alberto Cassella, 17, 20 March

1950 *An Glaodhach Deireannach* le Pádraig Ó Siochfhradha, 18-21 May

*Tons of Money*, 1-4 January 1948, was Walter Macken's last play at Taibhdhearc na Gaillimhe before his departure for the Abbey Theatre.

All of the plays up to January 1948 were produced by Bháitéar Ó Maicín (Walter Macken)

#### Notes:

\* Geamaireacht (Pantomime)

\*\* The opening performance of this play was commented on by Terence Ward writing in *The Irish Press* on the 23 June 1946 under the heading *29 Saw New Irish Play* in Galway.

\*\*\*Meascán, a mixed entertainment for St. Patrick's Day.

My meeting with Eamon was at his home in Furbo, Co. Galway on the 14 April 2008.

He gave me the following account of how he joined the Taibhdhearc and his time there as an actor.

*I did a play with the Legion of Mary for Cumann Drámaíochta na Scoile in Éireann <sup>64</sup>, all in Irish, in Galway. The Praesidium opened an Irish Branch called An Realt and I had a lot to do with An Realt.*

*I was given the lead man in the cast and another lady with the same name, Muiread McDonagh, she is dead and gone now, she was in the show opposite me. We were doing father and mother of the family. I forget now who the family were, they were young boys and girls, and we did the play in the Taibhdhearc and as it happened Walter Macken was the adjudicator. He gave the Galway drama first place.*

*And we were more than delighted and the strange thing about it there was always money for the winners of those plays from the Cumann Dramaíochta but that year they stopped it. I went to Walter Macken that day or the day after, we were doing the same play for some reason or other and he decided to ask me would I be interested in coming to the Taibhdhearc. I said, "don't ask me about that now until I probe a bit at home". My father didn't like the idea of going away to the Taibhdhearc or any other place where there were plays, because plays meant being out late at night, which was true for him. I often left the Taibhdhearc at 12 o'clock.*

*Some night during the following week this man came to the shop, we always had a shop, it's still there and he asked, he was a man I always knew, his name was Tommy King, he was the porter and helper and general wash-up*

*man at the Taibhdhearc and he called and he said to me, "Walter Macken would like to meet you in the Taibhdhearc tomorrow night if your free or to-night, he's always there". So I did go down that night. I couldn't make out what it was about, I thought it was something I said or done wrong and he wanted to correct me. "No", he said "I want to talk to you Eamon, would you ever think of joining the Taibhdhearc group" So that's how I got into the Taibhdhearc, asked by Walter Macken himself.*

*My first day there I walked in and I walked in straight down the side. I knew the Taibhdhearc, I had been going in to see the plays and I walked up on the stage. I was anxious to see what it look like out towards the audience and didn't I see Walter Macken above at the top between the two doors of the Taibhdhearc and I walked up to him and I said "Did you send for me Mr. Macken?" "I did" he said! I sent Tommy King to the shop for you". I said, "He did call". "I know", he said, "I knew you would like to look at the stage". I didn't see him at the back in the dark. Actually, he said "what I want to do is ask you if you would join our group here in the Taibhdhearc". And I said, "It is all a question of time for me, what time I would be able to leave for the Taibhdhearc". He said "anytime around 8.00 pm or 8.30 pm when you are closing the shop. We'd be glad to have you. When could you start"?*

*That's how I ended up in the Taibhdhearc, he asked me to come in and I asked him to give me a few weeks to break things at home, being out at night. He said "alright we are not starting rehearsals anyway yet, I have a part and all that I would like you to do in the next play because I think you are a character actor, you can form the character, if you are shown what it's like and that would suit here very well. I like you because you have great Irish and you are able to put on the part of an elderly man like you did for the Legion of Mary [play]". That's how I ended up in the Taibhdhearc.*

*My first part! I remember the drama well. I was in Drama at Inish but I didn't think anything of the title. I thought it meant nothing; it was a kind of imitation*

*I found him [Macken] quite good, quite good, he was always reasonable with me because I had the Irish. I found Macken as a director easy to work with. He had a great wish for me being an old Galwegian like himself. That was the first part I had with Macken. I found that Macken was very good to me. And very helpful, he would never jump at me over anything. He'd say "I'll tell you what to do there, put a bit more umph into certain sections and ease off in others. He was giving me direction. He was, he'd say "put the emphasis on the word you think should be shouted out"*

*I found him always, with me, I cannot say with others but with me I always found him that little bit kind, helpful, he never scolded me much over anything, he left a lot to myself, I used to be amazed at it at times.*

*He [Macken] always took a part. He always took the lead actually. I thought he was quite good, quite good and every single part he had he seemed to have me behind him all the time. If you look at the picture there you see the same thing, right behind him all the time, see **Picture 2.34** main text.*

*The reason for that in my opinion, I dare not say that, was because he did not always have his words good, off by heart, or rehearsed better. He always leaned on me because I always had my words and I have plenty of free Irish and I could tip off the words like that and switch them around He relied on me mostly to give him his answer at times.*

*The early part of the week of the show we would always start off, there was a dress rehearsals for the priests on a Thursday night we would go through the whole play to the bitter end for the priests and clergy of the Diocese. We used to get the placed packed.*

*I missed An Fear O'n Spideal, some thing happened, I could not attend that week or the week after and I told him to count me out.*

*The only think I ever remember that I thought a bit out of place for him was one night we were rehearsing on our own, that was seldom, he was always there. He was not there this night and we were doing the Viennese Waltz around the stage. The music was on for us and we were going around grand and the ladies had what we called bicycle skirts, the skirts were held out like a bicycle wheel. He was away, we thought for the night and didn't he walk in earlier than expected and he looked up at the girls and he said "who do you think ye are" he said and Peggy answered, she said "we are the lady staff and dancers and actors of the Taibhdhearc Mr. Macken", and he said to me "They look like a crowd of pregnant bitches" And Peggy, she was his wife, said, "what do you mean by saying that we are pregnant bitches Mr Macken" One of the girls said, "I second that" and he said "you shouldn't talk your more pregnant than the rest of them.*

*I found that a bit course and I wasn't too keen of Wally after that. I thought that wasn't fair and I didn't like it.*

*I was there when he left and I got the shock of my life and I lost all interest in the Taibhdhearc after he left. A lot of them lost interest after he left. Macken was a great adviser though he was not a man who tried to change your part or get you to do it in a different way.*

*I felt left out of it and I felt very lonely. He and I were Galwegians and he was a great man for the local person. He thought the world of Galway and old Galway and people whose parents were old Galway and my father and mother were that.*

*He being a Galway man and knowing the people, he was inclined to let things alone. He would test the strangers and if he did not like them he would let them go. I used to see the students coming down from the college. He had no time for those coming down from the college and looking for a part. He wanted to see people on the stage. He had a lot of respect for old Galway. He never liked to talk about where he lived in St. John's Terrace*

*He was going to give me the part of Mungo. He wanted someone to be in the lead who knew more about acting in their pattern of life, in walk, in everything. He liked to be the comedy relief himself for the laughs. On stage, he usually liked to be in the front line and even opening the show though he had me opening the show [and] that is not an easy thing. To walk in and talk on stage, it is not an easy thing to do to walk in.*

*The way it was with me I could not get away from the bloody parts. The time I was there I was in every single damn thing except one play where there was only two lads and a girl as far as I remember.*

## **2. Mairead Concannon** (formerly Ní Fhloinn) b.1925

Mairead was at the Taibhdhearc, mainly as an actor, over two separate periods of time. She joined the Taibhdhearc in 1946 and stayed until the early 1950s. Her second period was on her return to Galway after living on the Aran Islands and was from 1969.

She worked as a civil servant before her marriage and returned to the Civil Service after she was widowed. She retired as an Inspector of Taxes in Galway.

Among the plays that Mairead performed in were:

[This is not a complete list and includes some of her performances after she returned to the Taibhdhearc in 1969]

*An Cailín Aimsire Abú* le Bháitéar Ó Maicín, 3-6 October 1946

*Ara-na-Póg* le Dion Boucicault, 6-9 November 1947

*Seachtain an Dathadóireacht* le Rene Fauchois, 6-9 May 1948

*An t-Éan Príosúin (The Jail Bird)* le George Shiels, 14-17 October 1948

*Fir Rí na hAione* le M. J. Molloy, 15-18 December 1949

*Maggie Mór*, le John B. Keane, 28 March- 2 April 1971

*Dlí na Feilme (An Beo do Bhi)* le Micheál Ó hAodha, 3-10 June 1973

Our conversation took place at Mairead home in Renmore, Galway on the 30 September 2008.

*When I left school, I was in the civil service in Dublin. I worked with Revenue and I was transferred to the Galway office which was in the Custom House. While I was at school we spoke all Irish so I was always interested in the Irish language but the acting experience I had was very limited.*

*I was walking from the Custom House one evening, up around the back streets and I came across this Taibhdhearc na Gaillimhe. I had heard about it as an Irish theatre. Next time I passed the door was open so I did pop in for a look*

around. The foyer was just a makeshift; there was a box office in the front and little space all around. The door of the box office opened and this man came out and I spoke to him. I think I spoke in Irish. I said I was very interested in this Irish Theatre and I spoke Irish and I work nearby. He asked me 'What are you interested in?' I said 'I would be interested to come here to see you first and to see what is going on.' He said 'would you ever think of acting here' and I said 'of course if you considered me good enough'. 'I'll give you a try' he replied.

At the time I was staying in a house where the woman was a native Irish speaker. I told her about this and she said 'well, you must have good Irish and you must speak the native language so while you're in this house you'll speak Irish to me.'

So I went down and Wally gave me a part in *An Cailin Aimsir Abu*. It had been Walter Macken I met. I actually didn't ask him his name. Next time I met him he told me he was Bháitéir Ó Maicín and he was the producer of the plays.

The really frightening aspect of rehearsals which was not as bad as going on stage for the first time but at rehearsals Wally himself was very particular about the Irish language. He had a good grasp of Irish. He was able to get the nuances across and advise us how to do it so that we got on very well.

Now, at the Taibhdhearc, they were not all native speakers at the time. The native Irish speakers instead of being a help might even have been a hindrance because some of the dialect went so fast it was indistinct that they had to be slowed down. The rest of us were good Irish speakers. However, along with Wally, there was a young girl there, Lasairfhiona Ní Mháille; her father was Tomas Ó Máille in the University. She helped out and later on acted in the Taibhdhearc. Another girl, a teacher in the Mercy Convent, Máiread Nic Alastair, also helped out. Ita O'Mahony (Íde Ní Mhathúna) worked in the office at the time. She later acted there and went on later to act in the Abbey.

However, to get back to *An Cailin Aimsir Abu*, the first play. We did alright and audience came from the streets around. There was a big population there at the time and some others came in from the country. The play ran for a week and on the Saturday before the opening there was a special showing and this was intended for the clergy of Galway. The Bishop at the time did not allow the clergy of the diocese to attend at any public showing in the theatre. Many were teachers at St. Mary's College and they were all very good Irish scholars and extremely good critics.

I don't know how we got audiences but it wasn't that difficult at the time. I have forgotten if we had season tickets at that time (see **Appendix 2.10**, the letter from Macken to Richard Fox dated the 11 September 1947, page 2), but we did introduce that system later whereby we sold season tickets and the onus was on every one of us to get a certain number of people. We had a Guard from Kerry, Séamus Breathnach, and he almost forced people under

*law to come to the Taibhdhearc. He was a character. He used to rehearse his lines going up the street, directing traffic.*

*After the play finished on the Sunday night we had a party and that was really the highlight and we got paid. I can't remember exactly how many shillings we got but it was shillings. That was a big thing, we earned something. We were amateurs of course, not professionals. Then we had a big party. All the plays ended like that, after 4-5 weeks rehearsal, a week running and a big, big party. Then there was a rest and people were wondering who he would call back for the next play.*

*From time to time visitors came to the Taibhdhearc. I remember at one time film Producers' came to Galway and came to the Taibhdhearc. It was the only theatre in Galway at the time. They did have an interest in us too and did give us the chance to go further. I remember Cillian Ó Brollachan was on the board of directors, he was a professor in the university, and I remember he said to me 'Don't you take any notice of them. Mind your good job in the Civil service'.*

*The Board of directors at the time were all a bit daunting to us. We were only young people just left school and they were professors so we were more or less silent. Together there was no silence and that was a big problem. The Green Room was under the stage and there was always conversation and fooling of course and it was very easy for someone to miss a cue. The entrance onto the stage was quite confined in space. You had to jump up on to the wings to get out on the stage. We did have prompters. They were in the wings on both sides and would have been present at rehearsals*

*However, that was how I came to be in the Taibhdhearc. That was 1946, I think. I don't remember ever working with Frank Dermody and I do remember later on, years after, when Dermody came back to produce a play with us, how severe he was referring back to the early days and I was sorry I never got really talking to him.*

*Now, I have not spoken about Peggy Macken. She definitely was the right hand person there, always at Wally's side. She was really instrumental in keeping the group together. Wally did lose his temper. He was a very patient man although he did come out with some prize language. Time he had a go at us, after we forgot or did not walk right. He called us many things some of it would not be printable. But when it was all over he was a real friend, a real friend. I cannot remember exactly the circumstances that caused his sudden departure from the Taibhdhearc. I had a minor part in Ara-na-Póg. I know I was in An tÉan Priosúin but that was after Macken had left.*



Picture 2.39



*An t-Ean Priónúin* (The Jail Bird) le George Shiels, 14-17 September 1948

Left to right: Micheál MacGiolla Ceallaigh, Risteárd Ó Riain, Séamus Breathnach, Máighréad Nic Fhlionn, Máighréad Nic Donnchadha [NUIG Archive]

*Wally Macken did everything in the Taibhdhearc. He designed the sets, Tommie King, the carpenter, constructed them to his design and I think Peggy used to paint them. Some of us would help her of course but Peggy used to paint them, as I remember. Now there was a prop room but props came from our own houses wherever we lived we took them along for the duration of the play and took them home again. Costumes, at the time I've forgotten who was in charge of costumes. We had very little. We hired costumes a lot, from Gings and from Burke's. Make-up, I don't think we were ever instructed about make-up. That was mostly our problems in the early years, Wally and Peggy couldn't be doing everything. We just made do ourselves.*

*When he was on the stage with us, even with the most experienced, he was still the master so there was always deference to him. Those of us who were smart enough at the time, we always copped-on and learned a bit. I remember we learned watching other actors, when we were waiting in the wings seeing how they performed and interpreting things. It was a great thing because otherwise we had no instruction except Wally who had to look after the lines of the play and the movement on stage. Then when we came to the end we did get applause. I don't know how we were trained to take our bow, Wally must have set us up for that, main characters in the centre and the others to the side and Tommie King always got his show too. And I must say he deserved it.*

*The players got along very well. There was no rivalry in a theatre like that we were all part-timers. Of course we were working during the day. We were teachers, civil servants, people who worked in shops, the lads from the army and students.*

*Rehearsals were a mixture of English and Irish. Even in Wally's time. Wally was quite fluent in Irish but there was certainly a mixture of English and Irish*

*and as I have already said there would have been complaints because of the variety of Irish, particularly with the students from Donegal, Kerry and our own native speakers from Connemara and the Islands. The mingling of those dialects was always confusing to people. There were teachers and school inspectors who came and criticised those that did not have good 'book' Irish, school Irish, 'an gramadach'. Punctuality at rehearsals was a problem. It's hard to blame people that could not come in time though often it was a bit of laxity. Wally did not want that. He was very firm and very strict and also very patient.*

*When I would see him up on stage it was like military control. He knew exactly the position for everyone and that he had to get right. There couldn't be masking and you always had to be in sight for everybody from all corners of the theatre. He knew that instinctively. About entrances, he said 'you walk on with aplomb'.*

*I was on stage maybe two or three times each year because it was not that easy to get people acting. We didn't have auditions, until the like of Priestly-Mitchell came or Tomas Mac Anna. That was after Wally's time. We never had training like that in Wally's time but it did mean a lot.*

*The people of Galway were proud of it as an Irish theatre because it was unique. They did support us not maybe out of arts sake but out of loyalty. It was a very good thing. We did get good audiences but at times the audiences were small. I can't ever remember in those early years playing to a very few people but the policy was that no matter how many persons had paid their money came that you played. Of course, there were matinees then. Those matinees were usually on a Sunday afternoon*

*When Wally left we were all surprised. We thought that it was only temporary. We weren't told what went on. The Board of directors had meeting but we weren't told about these things that was never part of the compántas and in those days we didn't have a compántas meeting (**Footnote 2.11**). That was introduced afterwards and it was very good.*

*Wally Macken was an exemplary man. He was very philosophical about life and I think he was very patient because of that. We were never told about any conflict or any row between himself and the directors. Whatever happened we never knew.*

*Wally was missed. The grá, the sean-grá wasn't there. After that we weren't a family any more. Then, you see, we were never paid except the few shillings after each play. We called it a donation. It wasn't tuarastal [wages] anyway.*

*The atmosphere in the Taibhdhearc changed after he left, it did, actually it did. We were lonely. The girls were particularly lonely for Peggy. We liked Peggy Macken very much. She was really one of ourselves and we missed them very much. Tommie King was heart broken although Wally did give him a hard time now and again.*

**Footnote 2.11:** *compántas* = association, *compántas aisteoirí* = troupe of actors. A form of staff association.

*Peggy Macken, I was sorry we lost contact with her. Wally and Peggy were so involved in the theatre that they were not party to a circle of outside friends. Not really. They were very, very, very private. Well I think Wally's mind was always on notions, ideas, things, I wasn't surprised when he started writing and made a success of it. He lived in another world. The rest of us acted. It was a very happy atmosphere. We made great friends that lasted a lifetime, I can say that definitely. It's a good thing to say.*

### 3. **Íde Ní Mhathúna/ Idhe Ní Mhathghamhna (Ita O'Mahony) b. 1924**

Íde Ní Mhathúna joined the Taibhdhearc about 1944 as a secretary before being 'converted' to one of the Taibhdhearc's prominent performers in the 1940s'. She was a sister of Cyril O'Mahony, see **Footnote 2.5**. Her first performance at the Taibhdhearc was *An Stoirm* by Alexandre Ostrovsky, 11-14 May, 1944. The play was directed by Macken who also played in it.

Ita left the Taibhdhearc in 1947 to join the Abbey Theatre Company in Dublin. Her letter of resignation, dated the 3 October 1947, addressed 'Don Bainisteoir' with the opening greeting: 'A Bháitéar a chara,' mentions her going to Dublin on the 15 October <sup>61</sup>. Walter Macken joined the Abbey Company in 1948 and Íde performed with him during his time there. She continued as an Abbey actor into the 1950s' and her last play with the company was Macken's *Home is the Hero* in 1952 at the Queen's Theatre.

The following list contains some of the plays she performed in:

- 1944: *An Stoirm* by Alexandre Ostrovsky, 11-14 May  
*Oighreacht na Mara* by Walter Macken, 22-25 June (also May 1945)  
*T' Athair Dílis* le Gerard Healy, 28-31 December
- 1945: *Twelfth Night* by William Shakespeare, 15-18 November
- 1946: *Drama at Inish* by Lennox Robinson, 25-28 April  
*Cathal Buidhe* by Eibhlin Ní Bhaoighill, 20-23 June  
*Shadow and Substance* by Paul Vincent Carroll, 5-8 September  
*The Money doesn't Matter* by Louis D'Alton, 7-10 November  
*Of Mice and Men* by John Steinbeck, 5-8 December
- 1947: *She Stoops to Conquer* by Oliver Goldsmith, 8-11 May  
*An t-Iúdach Pólach* by Erckmann- Chatrian, 12-15 June  
*Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* by Molière, 2-5 October

Picture 2.40



Ita with Cathal Ó Conchubhair in *Of Mice and Men* by John Steinbeck, 5-8 December 1946. Photo courtesy: Ita Durnin (O'Mahony)

Her departure from the Taibhdhearc was reported in the *Connacht Sentinel*, 6 January 1948, front page. That report made no mention of the Macken departure which was covered in the pre-Christmas editions:

#### Another Taibhdhearc Players Goes

.... Miss O'Mahoney who has been one of the principal members of the Taibhdhearc na Gaillimhe company in the past few years has joined the Abbey Theatre....

My conversation with Ita O'Mahony took place at her home in Sandymount, Dublin, on 26 March 2009 with a final conversation on the 18 October 2009.

*It's such a long time ago:- but I think I was about 20 when I joined the Taibhdhearc. I had already been a member of an orchestra which was founded by Fr. Mallon SJ – the members ranged in age from 16 to 76 and I played 2<sup>nd</sup> fiddle. I loved that, but, when rehearsal times began to clash – I had to make a choice and stayed with the Taibhdhearc.*

*There had been a 'runai', a secretary cum actress there called Máire NicGiolla Máirtín but sadly she died young. I think then that Wally himself had been trying to cope with secretarial work as well as being actor, manager, producer, set designer, etc., and he asked me if I would take it over and I did. I dread to think of my initial efforts at taking minutes at Director's Meetings – altho', they were not frequent and attended only by Wally himself and by I can*

only recall Professor Liam O'Brien, Professor Murphy and Tomas O'Maille – the latter I think was an English man but he spoke Irish like a true native speaker.

There was always efforts to secure original plays in Irish and of course Wally himself provided most of these. International plays were translated mostly by Aodh Mac Dhúbháin (Hugh McGuane) a Galway schoolteacher who was also an actor. We all looked forward to gathering for a new production. Wally would have done the casting and we would read through the play, being very conscious of playwrights descriptions of characters and direction of movement. We were amateurs of course and there was none of the stress of playing to full houses – indeed audiences were sparse but we had a faithful following of people who had a great desire to keep the Irish language alive and we were keenly interested and there was always I think, a sense of emptiness when the curtain came down on the last night of a production.

It wasn't professional theatre. At the end of the run we would get 10/- each. I cannot hear Wally's voice telling me to move here or the move there, you see he was always on stage with us. He was in every play with us. I can't remember Wally talking to us from the auditorium. I think he had it all worked out and he was on stage with us. I don't think there was any play he wasn't in. The play I remember most was Oighreacht na Mara. Another was An Fear ón Spídeál. Wally was wonderful in the pantomime. He used songs from the times translated to Irish.

It's likely I would have stayed with the Taibhdhearc if Professor O'Briain hadn't suggested the Abbey to me, and gave me a letter of introduction to Earnan de Blaghd. I had an interview with him but, made no preparation for the audition as well! Anyway he gave me a six month contract. He paid me 30 shillings a week. That was 1947. Ria Mooney – a very famous actress of the first Abbey Company had come back as Producer and I got on really well with her, so I didn't get my walking papers after six months.

I knew it was soon after I left that Wally arrived. I was just amazed, amazed that he left. Wally was a bit sad when I was leaving, not for me really but he was kind of saying 'the poor old Taibhdhearc we come and we leave, we don't stay there forever'. I have a feeling that it was November and Wally was so nice when I was leaving. They really did not have very much money. But I went off to the station. I went by myself, there was no one else around, and who arrives but Wally with a big bag of oranges. I was so touched.

Wally came to the Abbey in early 1948. It must have been such a wrench for him to leave the Taibhdhearc and Galway but also, now that his job was to be an actor only he would have more time for writing. He, Peggy and their two young sons Wally óg and Ultan settled into a house near the Phoenix Park. I didn't see too much of Wally after that. He would be at rehearsals and then at home. He would not have been knocking around with the rest of us.

I can remember being in George Shiel's The Jailbird with Wally and also in An Prosadh by An Craoibhin but it was in M. J. Molloy's The King of Friday's

*Men that Wally playing Bartley – so very suited to his natural talent, brought him special notice and invitations to Broadway and I think Hollywood.*

*However, when Wally returned to Ireland he also returned to Galway and to full time writing. I had been playing in his Home is the Hero, one of the longest running plays ever in the Abbey. I remember playing Josie, the daughter. I left the Abbey to be married and my acting dwindled after that. I've never had a longing to go back there 'tho I'm always interested in theatrical happenings and I've enjoyed the experience and now the memories. I've oft had a yearning to return to music making. I still have my fiddle and attempt to play it if I'm sure there's no one in hearing distance.*

*I hardly associate him with the Abbey at all. I just associate him with the Taibhdhearc I thought he was wonderful, really wonderful. That he was so tolerant of the lot of us there and that he was so easy going and that he made our lives so enjoyable in a very pleasant way. If the young ones today only knew what it was like but he was so happy. You just loved going down to the Taibhdhearc, meeting everybody, Wally and Peggy and all the others. I just remember that they were very happy times.*

## **Chapter 3: Walter Macken and the Abbey Theatre**

### **Appendices 3.1-3.3**



**Extracts from the reviews of the Abbey plays in which Walter Macken played from August 1948 until October 1950.**

**The plays presented in English:**

***The Lucky Finger* by Lennox Robinson, 23 August 1948:**

- *The Irish Times*, 24 August 1948, page 3.

‘New Robinson comedy opens at the Abbey.

.... *The Lucky Finger* is an actress play and the laurels go to Eileen Crowe.... There is no weak playing anywhere among the remaining 20 members of the cast ....’ (K)

- *The Irish Press*, 24 August 1948, page 4

Lennox Robinson New Play ‘Must not be Missed’

Ó Maicin’s performance was described as: ‘excellent’, ‘Breezy, close to the soil’. (TM)

- *The Irish Independent*, 24 August 1948, page 6

‘Lennox Robinson returns to Inish’

Macken just mentioned as playing a ‘mountainy man’ supporting the lead actors. (BK’s column ‘Around the Theatre’)

***The King of Friday’s Men* by M. J. Molloy, 18 October 1948:**

- *The Irish Times* 19 October 1948, page 3.

‘Play on Feudal System of 18<sup>th</sup> Century West

.... From the acting viewpoint, the play is almost exclusively Walter Macken. To the part of Bartley Dowd, Mr. Macken brings a rich knowledge of the locale of the play, a good physique, and, above all a voice sensitively tuned to bring out every cadence of some of the loveliest lines written in the Irish theatre since the death of Synge.

These qualities combine to give Mr. Macken’s performance a satisfying wholeness such as has not been seen since Cusack’s “*Playboy*” in a part of the kind.’ (K)

- *The Irish Independent*, 19 October 1948, page 6.

‘Great New Play at the Abbey

.... The first act is a masterpiece and from the very moment Walter Macken as Bartley, comes awake to rescue beauty in distress he dominates the play. This actor has never been seen to such advantage on the Dublin stage ...’ (BK)

- *The Irish Press*, 19 October 1948, page 9.

(*The Irish Press* announce the play on the 18 October in Tony Molloy’s Theatre Column, page 4, mentioning that ‘the lead will be played by Walter Macken ...’.)

‘Abbey’s best for a long time”

Paragraph 4 leads with ‘Macken Brilliant’ and goes on to say: ‘The difficult lead was handles in brilliant poise by Wally Macken ...’ (TM)

### ***The Grand House in the City* by Brinsley McNamara, 29 January 1949**

- *The Irish Times*, 1 February 1949, page 5

‘*The Grand House in the City*, revived after 12 years

... has as its central theme the conflict between the effete, ineffectual survivor of the old landed gentry, played with quiet effectiveness by Brian O’Higgins and the loud, vulgar, land-grabber, a role which gave Walter Macken a good opportunity for an energetic colourful character study.” (No credit)

- *The Irish Independent*, 2 February 1949. page 6

‘Long awaited revival at the Abbey

.... Walter Macken’s performance in the part of the gombeen man mixes pathos, cunning and the grabber’s crudity in a most marvellous way.’ (BK)

- *The Irish Press*, 1 February 1949, page 9

‘*The Grand House in the City*, revived’

TM wrote a very positive review on the play. On Macken the comment was:

‘.... Equally outstanding was Walter Macken’s Owen Lynam. Walter Macken is an actor of clear, sounding vibrant quality and all his work is graceful and powerfully conceived. He completely fills whatever part he is playing and last night he gave full measure.”

***The Bugle in the Blood*** by Bryan McMahon, 14 March 1949

- *The Irish Times*, 15 March 1949, page 4.

***'The Bugle in the Blood***

In the main, Ria Mooney's cast served the author well.... Brian O'Higgins 'Joseph Trimble' and Walter Macken's 'Circus Jack' kindled a new flame of hope for the survival of Abbey acting ...' (K)

- *The Irish Press*, 15 March 1949, page 4.

***'The Bugle in the Blood***

.... Walter Macken as a rowdy thimblerrigger carried the house again and again ...' (TM)

- *The Irish Independent*, 20 April 1949, page 2.

***'Short-story writer's success in a new field***

.... The casting too gave excellent opportunities .... To Walter Macken as a beflowered juggler with cartwheels ....' (BK)

***All Souls' Night*** by Joseph Tomelty, 16 April 1949

This was Easter weekend and the weekend of the declaration of the Irish Republic. The reviews of the Tomelty play were carried by *The Irish Press* and *The Irish Independent* while *The Irish Times* carried a report on the Easter commemoration performances presented at the Abbey Theatre on the 18 April (Easter Monday) 1949.

- *The Irish Press*, 19 April 1949, page 4.

***'Fishing village stresses make exciting play***

.... I liked Walter Macken's easiness.' (TM)

- *The Irish Independent*, 20 April 1949, page 2.

***'Sombre play with sea setting at the Abbey***

.... Walter Macken, Harry Brogan and Labhras O Gallchobhair handled competently the three lesser parts....' (BK)



Easter commemoration performances of *Dervogilla* and *The Rising of the Moon* by Lady Gregory and *Lost Light* by Roibéard Ó Taracháin (misprint, should read Ó Faracháin) at the Abbey Theatre, 18 April 1949 and reviewed in *The Irish Times* on the 19 April 1949, page 5. Macken played the Sergeant in *The Rising of the Moon* and the following is an extract from the review under the heading:

‘Three plays at the Abbey

.... Any actor appearing in it today must suffer by comparison with past performances;  
.... Last nights cast did it adequate justice ....’ (K)

*The Country Dressmaker* by George Fitzmaurice, 24 May 1949

- *The Irish Times*, 24 May 1949, page 5

‘The Country Dressmaker, George Fitzmaurice

‘.... Walter Macken as Quilter, the sloothering match-maker kept reminding me of Bottom’s “I’ll roar you as gently as any sucking dove”. He rocked the house and dominated the stage while he was on and carried with Miss Ní Loinsigh the weight of the production....’ (K)

- *The Irish Press*, 24 May 1949, page 6

‘Abbey Revival has a Traditional Theme

.... This new production by Ria Mooney makes the comedy run with a pleasing lightness which belies its thirty years of age. ... Walter Macken makes Luke Quilter, the match maker, dominate the entire action.’

*The Irish Independent*, 24 May 1949, page 5

The reported is in the ‘Around the Theatres’ column under the headline:

‘Abbey Revival of Popular Comedy

.... Considered Ria Mooney’s production hindered rather than helped by a hideous subsidiary curtain and a bizarre setting by Vere Dudgeon and Sean Barlow.... But in the first and third Acts the superb acting of Brid Lynch and Walter Macken saved the situation....’

Ida Ní Mhathuna and others ‘managed well in lesser parts’ (BK)

[*The Irish Times* on the 27 June mentioned *The Country Dressmaker* resuming with the *Dreaming of the Bones* while *The Irish Press* on the 28 June refers to the continuation of the play. Tony Molloy in his Theatre Column in *The Irish Press* on the 27 June reports the Abbey reopening with the two plays.]

*Ask for me To-morrow* by Ralph Kennedy, 3 October 1949

- *The Irish Times*, 4 October 1949, page 5

*'Ask for me Tomorrow*

.... The cast of ten are all well grooved to their characters .... Walter Macken as a not particularly imaginative spectator and commentator on the disruption of the Browne family, gave a richly comic Macken performance.' (K)

- *The Irish Press*, 5 October 1949, page 6

*'New play at the Abbey*

... Walter Macken's occasional appearances were as welcome as a fresh breeze.' (TM)

- *The Irish Independent*, 4 October 1949, page 6

*'New play at the Abbey*  
*Drama in a Country Bank House*

.... a satisfying and impressive play .... Walter Macken brings his rich and vigorous personality to bear on this part of Aeneas Murphy with almost overpowering force ...' (AJM)

*Design for a Headstone* by Seamus Byrne, 8 April 1950

- *The Irish Times*, 10 April 1950, page 5

*'Design for a Headstone*

... and Walter Macken as the sceptical iconoclastic McGowan gave a beautiful study of volcanic violence barely controlled.' (K)

- *The Irish Independent*, 11 April 1950, page 3

New Abbey play has prison camp theme

Walter Macken as Ructions McGowan, doing his best to live up to his name, seems unsure of his handling of this complex character that owes a little to Marx, a little to Voltaire and much to his own warring mind in which the resentment of a man of action confined within a prison camp finds outlet in bitter railing.’ (IM)

- *The Irish Press*, 10 April 1950, page 6

‘.... Not a great play.

.... Walter Macken as Ructions McGowan puts life into the Voltaire and Marx – quoting prisoner whose theological arguments with the priest (Liam O’Foghlú) gives the play its clash of ideologies and temperament.

There were good performances from both of them with the odd little touch of fire in the acting when the flint of Marxism rasps against the steel of Catholicism....’ (TPK)

*Mountain Flood* by Jack P. Cunningham, 10 August 1950

- *The Irish Independent*, 11 August 1950, page 8

‘Somber peasant theme of new Abbey play

Acting honours: Mr. Cunningham is well served by the cast. Walter Macken, as he always does, brings force and meaning to the stage – as Black Anthony.’ (BK)

- *The Irish Press*, 11 August 1950, page 7

‘Rugged drama at Abbey

.... Apart from a great deal of over playing, when the material cried out for restraint, the Abbey cast put some wonderful work into the play.

... and Walter Macken (as the fierce dispenser of justice) carried the brunt of the acting among the men...’ (NC)

- *The Irish Times*, 11 August 1950, page 5

‘*Mountain Flood* at the Abbey

.... Mr. Cunningham’s play does not ring true; it has no heart in it. ....

To discuss the quality of the acting in the circumstances, hardly would be fair. Walter Macken,..., probably made the best of a bad job, and, if there was a little ranting and roaring, they can be forgiven on the grounds that they had to get a little life into it somehow.' (GHG)

## **Irish plays**

The reviews and indeed reports on the performances of the Irish language plays presented by the Abbey are 'hit and miss' affairs. All are listed in the theatre columns but many receive no further attention. This has resulted in a less than complete comment on the productions and performances. This lack of reporting may say more about the Irish language skills of the reviewers and also about the perceived interest that the papers readers had in these productions.

### ***Marie Ros* le J. M. Barrie, 15 March 1948**

- *The Irish Times*, 17 March 1948, page 3.

'*Mary Rose* in Irish at the Abbey

Of the cast I liked Brid Ni Loinsigh, Maire Ni Dhomhnaill and Walter Macken.'

- *The Irish Press*, 16 March 1948, page 4.

'*Mary Rose* in Gaelic

Though the piece is almost essentially a one-part play, yet there were a number of splendid little cameos created ... In these Brid Ni Loinsigh, Micheál O Briain and Walter Macken excelled'. (TM)

### ***Bean an Mhi-Ghra* le Jacinto Benavente, 31 October 1949**

- *The Irish Press*, 1 November 1949, page 5

'Spanish play in Irish at the Abbey

Walter Macken as the stepfather and murderer, smouldered nicely between brooding and flaring.' (TM)

- *The Irish Independent*, 1 November 1949, page 4

'Abbey,



## Spanish Drama in Irish

Bhaitear O Maicin plays the complex character of the stepfather with restraint.' (RS)

### *Niall agus Carmelita*, 26 December 1949

- *The Irish Independent*, 28 December 1949, page 6

#### 'Tuneful Pantomime in Irish

Macken is mentioned as the villainous Balor. There is no comment on any of the performances. (RS)

- *The Irish Times*, 28 December 1949, page 7

#### 'Christmas Shows

#### *Niall agus Carmelita*

Described by O'C: as the 'slickest I have seen in an Abbey pantomime'. Macken mentioned among the cast.

### *Tristan agus Isialt* le Joseph Bedier agus Louis Artus, 22 May 1950

- *The Irish Press*, 23 May 1950, page 5

#### 'Colourful Abbey production

....The large cast received an enthusiastic ovation for a performance which started shakily enough but which acquired a high degree of confidence later in the play....' (RJ)

- *The Irish Independent*, 23 May 1950, page 10

#### 'Drama in Irish at the Abbey

....Almost the whole Abbey cast is marshalled to fill a multitude of minor parts and there is not a weak link to be found....' (RS)

Appendix 3.2

May 24, 1950.

Mr. Walter Macken  
c/o Breslins Hotel  
Bunbeg County  
Donegal, Ireland

Dear Mr. Macken:

Michael Molloy has suggested we write you regarding the American production of THE KING OF FRIDAY'S MEN.

We are extremely interested in having you do the part of Bartley on the basis of Molloy's high recommendation and the notices you received in the Irish Press. We plan an early Fall production, for which you would have to be available about July 1st. We understand there is a problem about your coming to America because of contract obligations at the Abbey. We feel confident that acting Bartley over here would foster great success for you in the American stage and motion picture industry.

We would greatly appreciate direct correspondence from you on this matter, stating the conditions of your availability and your terms, should you get leave of absence from the Abbey and come here for our production. I am sure we can agreeably discuss terms, besides, we are in a position to help you get additional contract after the run of this play, should you desire them.

Sincerely,

*Peter White*  
Peter White

PW:js



### Appendix 3.3: Walter Macken's Resignation from the Abbey Theatre

1/3



Guthán  
Oifig na dTicéad 74505  
Oifig an Rúnaí 73412

## AMHARCLANN NA MAINISTREACH

BLEÁ CLIATH, C.8.

Data, 26/10/1950

Stiuthóirí: LEAMHNACH ROBASTÚN, RISTEARD Ó h-AODHA,  
EARNAN DE BLAGHD, ROIBEARD Ó FARACHAIN  
Bainisteoir Stíurtha: EARNAN DE BLAGHD  
Rúnaí: ERIC GORMAN

A Bhaiteir, a chara,

Ta se socruithe gan JUNO AND THE PAYCOCK a dheanamh roimh Nollaig. Da bhri sin, caithfimid tosnu Dia Mairt ag cleachtadh PROFESSOR TIM. Ta páirt ann duit-se. Mar sin, is doigh liom go bhfuil sé riachtanach socrú láithreach i dtaobh an turais go Meirice. Do bheadh sé mí-shásúil bheith idir-eatortha nios sia. Beidir go dtiocfa isteach ag caint liom amaireach.

Mise, le meas,

*Earnan de Blaghd*

Bhaitear O Maicin, Uasal.

31 Ardpatrik Road,  
Cabra,  
Dublin.  
Oct. 27, 1950.

Earnan de Blaghd,  
Bainisteoir Stiurtha,  
Amharclann na hAinistreach,  
BLEA CLIAITH.C.8.

A chara,

Go raibh maith agat as ucht do leitir den 26u.

Táim ag machtnaigh ar an sgeal le fada, agus ar mhi-shastacht an  
caoi ina bhuilfimid i ngeall ar an turas go Merioca, agus se mo .  
thuairim nach bhfuil ach bealach amháin sasuil as agus se sin go  
neireochainn as mo phost mar aisteoir sa Mainistir.

Da bhrígh sin cuirim chugat le seo fogra faoi. Seo e an uair is  
fearr nar nach bhfuilim pairteach i ndrára ar bith i lathair na huairé,  
is ní raibh le deanai, agus nilim pairteach i gcleachtuighthe agus ní  
ghcrtochaidh m'ínteachta an amharclann nó an gcomhlacht.

Mise le meas,





Guthán  
Oifig na dTicéad 74505  
Oifig an Rúnaí 73412

## AMHARCLANN NA MAINISTREACH

BLEÁ CLIATH, C.B.

Dáta, 27/10/1950

*Stiurthóir:* LEAMHNACH ROBASTÚN, RISTEARD Ó h-AODHA,  
EARNAN DE BLAGHD, ROIBEARD Ó FARACHAIN  
*Bainisteoir Stiurtha:* EARNAN DE BLAGHD  
*Rúnaí:* ERIC GORMAN

Bhaitear Uasal O Maicin,  
31 Ard Patrick Road,  
CABRA

A Bhaiteir, a chara,

Toisc a mhi-chinnteacht is tá data do imtheachta go Meirice ba dheacair tu chur i ndrama a leanfadh beidir go Nollaig. Dá bhri sin ceapaim gur fearr mar shocrú tu do eiri as an bhfoirinn go sealadach. Glacaim le do litir diorscoir ar an dtuiscint sin. Fé mar adurt leat, beidh failte romhat nuair a bheas tu saor chun teacht thar n-ais go dtí an fhoireann.

Mise, le meas,

*Earnan de Blaghd*

## **Chapter 4: The years after the Abbey**

### **Appendices 4.1-4.29**

## Appendix 4.1

**THE KING OF FRIDAY'S MEN COMPANY**

ROOM 906

1619 BROADWAY

NEW YORK 19, N. Y.

PLaza 7-2187

Michael P. Grace II

February 23, 1951

Mr. Walter Macken  
"King of Friday's Men" Co.  
Playhouse Theatre  
137 West 48th St.  
New York, N.Y.

Dear Mr. Macken

This is to advise you that the "King of Friday's Men"  
will terminate its run at the playhouse theatre on Friday Night  
February 23, 1951.

Yours very truly,

*Michael Grace*

Michael Grace



## Appendix 4.2

MICHAEL POWELL (THEATRE) LIMITED

## S A L A R I E S

Name Mr. W. Macken

Week Ending 3.11.51

Gross Salary					50	
<u>Deductions</u>						
Nat. Insurance			51			51
Income Tax						
Nett					49.14	11

## Appendix 4.3

### MANAGER'S REPORT

For fortnight ending 26th November, 1952.

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HOME IS THE HERO ended what we called its 17th week on last Saturday. During the period, however, five nights were given up to other plays, namely, three nights to THE WHITEHEADED BOY and two nights to THE PLAYBOY OF THE WESTERN WORLD. On the other hand, there was an extra performance of HOME IS THE HERO on Sunday week, 16th November. Consequently, the actual run of HOME IS THE HERO amounted to sixteen weeks and two nights. Thus, it fell short of reaching its 100th performance by two nights.

I had been anxious to get another week out of it, but that was clearly impossible. Neither in its second last week nor in its last week had we any substantial improvement in attendance. The total number of people seeing the play in the fifteenth week was 3,737. In the sixteenth week when Second Last Week notices went up, attendance rose only to 3,898, and during the last week it went up only to 4,099. It can therefore be said that everything that could be got out of the play in the way of bringing newcomers or casuals to the theatre was got. During the seventeenth<sup>A</sup> week in which the play figured on our bills, there were 11 weeks in which losses were incurred, though on one occasion the deficit went as low as £2. 15. 0. During the other six weeks there were profits. The losses for the period totalled £886. 14. 9. The profits amounted to £377. 16. 3, leaving a nett loss of £408. 18. 6. As our subsidy spread over playing weeks of the year is about £185 per week, or a total of £3,145 for the period, the run of HOME IS THE HERO left the theatre some £2,700 better off. The statistics as a whole, however, illustrate how completely dependent on the subsidy we must be while we remain in the Queen's.



# PLAYS and FILMS



the traditional brown-coloured programme and is using black and brick-red, or is it scarlet?

"Home Is The Hero," Walter Macken's new play, which is having so successful a run at the moment, is, without any doubt, a good play, with a fine tight central situation, packed with conflict and tension and excellent character drawing. As good a situation as any dramatist could have picked. The father of a family, one Paddy O'Reilly, comes back to his home in a back street in Galway after having served a five years' sentence for killing a man in a fit of drunken temper, and the play is the story of the day of his homecoming. Before he was sent away, Paddy was a fine figure of a man around his back street and further afield. A vainglorious, shoddily-popular show-off, apparently, and something of the "house devil, street angel" type. His family await his return with natural trepidation. His son and daughter have grown up in the five years and his hardworking wife has let the top room to a couple of not too-wildly desirable lodgers to help make ends meet. His partially crippled son, whose shoemaking has supported the home, has fallen in love with the daughter of the man Paddy killed. His daughter, who had been the subject of some ill-natured teasing amongst her school acquaintances on her father's account, has fallen in love with a young man named Manchester Monahan who prefers to make his living without working. And that's quite enough to go on with!

Black pudding has been got for his welcome-home meal and is actually frying on the Abbey stage in the opening few minutes of the play. You can hear it sizzling! And a few bottles of stout have been ordered. Paddy has had five years to think over the consequences of his ill-temper and he's not proud of himself at all. He wants to come home without any fuss. He has by-passed the local reception committee organised mainly by the lodger he does not yet know about, and arrives by the back-door. He has spent the bit of money they gave him on leaving the jail on pathetic little presents for his family. So you'd think everything would work out reasonably well. But, if it did, there wouldn't be any play, and it didn't work out at all well. Paddy begins straightaway to find fault with everything. Things, he feels, have gone to pieces in his absence. The lodgers must go forthwith. He doesn't care whether their ten shillings a week is useful or not. His wife, who, with the help of his son, has made such a gallant effort to keep the home together, is still in terror of him. His daughter has grown up into a pert little piece who is able to answer him back. His son has in him something of the simple quality of a workaday saint, but he knows his father for what he is and the best allowances he can make for him are not good enough. This Paddy O'Reilly is a very well drawn character. He hasn't yet got his bearings. He is, as his son says, mixed-up. He is torn one way and another and, although he is clearly quite an impossible person to live with, he, at times, states his own side of the case with quite a measure of reason in his arguments. How the black pudding finished up was not quite clear, but he made his wife pour the bottles of stout down the sink. He had sworn off the drink because of what it had led him into, but he was so humanly drawn, and played, that one felt that, if that was all the good it did to his temper, a ration of one bottle a day would have helped.

The curtain for the second act falls on Paddy walloping his daughter with a strap and it rises for the third act with him just finishing off the job of teaching her a lesson on non-Montessori principles. It seemed to us to be a mistake for the dramatist to allow Paddy to attempt to manhandle his daughter with a strap on-stage when all he could do, in the nature of things, was attempt a few most unconvincing taps that brought us near to burlesque. She should have been walloped off-stage if she had to be walloped.

We thought the ending of the play rather too long drawn out. We'd have preferred it to have ended with what would have been the classic ending, at the point where Paddy in another

fit of anger knocks the drunken lodger down the stairs and thinks he has killed him and that he will have to go through all that all over again after his one misused day of liberty. However, it's not our play and if we want plays written our way, why don't we write them? No answer.

One thing struck us more forcibly than ever before. The present-day Abbey audience seems to us to be little short of a menace. It wants to laugh at everything and it doesn't seem to mind what it laughs at. That's all right at a circus but it's not all right in a theatre like the Abbey. Whenever the word "bloody" was used, and it was used more than once, there was a gale of rather imbecile laughter. Rare fun! Say it again!... But there is something more important to be considered. The mention of names that are sacred to all Christians was received with the same foolish gales of laughter. And there is something seriously wrong there. We know that it is not unusual for Irish people in ordinary life to use ejaculations of a religious nature under stress of emotion but, in ordinary life, they are taken for what they are and they do not produce laughter. In the theatre, with the kind of audiences we have now, they apparently do. Surely a playwright should be able to avoid this.

The acting in this play was very good all round. Brian O'Higgins, with a very good make-up, made a very impressive Paddy coming back to his home by the back way. He looked exactly as a man might look if he were just released after five years in jail and we think he got every ounce out of the mixed-upness in Paddy's soul. Eileen Crowe, as Paddy's wife, had a more ordinary kind of part than some of the others and no more could be done with it. Siobhan Ni Eaghra had a charmingly drawn little part to play as Lily Green, the daughter of the man Paddy killed and she played it very naturally and sweetly and nicely. Harry Brogan as the lodger and Marie Ni Chathain as his wife had parts that were gifts for them and Ita Ni Mhathuna did well with the not too grateful part of Paddy's daughter. Michael O'Kearney had a long and difficult part to play as the shoemaking son and he played it very well, with a quiet distinction. Liam O'Foghtu, who played Manchester, is already in some danger of being "typed" as a spiv of Irish manufacture, and once again he did very well in this novel role. By the way, it was a tribute to the excellence of Brian O'Higgins' "Paddy" that we wouldn't have minded if he'd dramatized and allowed Manchester just one crack at him with those satin-brass knuckledusters.

Brid Ni Loinsigh was perfection in her short appearance as the widowed Mrs. Green. We think we have said what we are going to say before, but we'll say it again for good measure. In presenting certain types of Irish country women with the simple dignity that is in so many of them, Brid Ni Loinsigh is the best actress we have seen in the Abbey and we have been watching Abbey plays for a very long time now. Every movement, every intonation is perfect.

This was a good cast and it was a fine play



## Appendix 4.5

New York Times Sunday Sept 12 '54

DRAMA

# AUTHOR VS. ACTOR

## Neutral Observer Says Responsibility For Stage Work Cannot Be Settled

By WALTER MACKEN

The writer, a former member of the Abbey Theatre, is the author of "Home in the Hero," in which he plays a starring role. The play is due at the Booth on Sept. 22.

**I**T is a widely known fact that playwrights and actors do not really mix. If the actor gives a good performance, the playwright, naturally enough, preens himself on the wonderful part he wrote, while the actor presumes that yes, the part as originally written was fairly good, but what would it have been if it had not been created from lines on a sheet of paper.

So, there you have it. Nothing succeeds like success; and, while the actor may congratulate the playwright and the playwright may congratulate the actor, both have their own reasons for the success. Also, it is well known that when a play is rehearsed, no matter what goes wrong with staging or acting, or lines or props, the blame is generally placed at the door of the playwright. So it is a fortunate thing for the playwright that he is not always backstage at all the rehearsals, or he would seriously interfere with the main pleasure of rehearsals.

Thus, when the playwright has to become a member of the company producing the play he wrote, he is stepping into fairly hot water. In the first place, he is a bit of a spoilsport: if he is around, you cannot say what you think about the wrong things he has done, and why and how you would have written the part and the play if you had the time and the inclination. If the playwright is in the company, you have to look over your shoulder before you say what is wrong and it sort of spoils everything.

### Constant Warfare

It is also a bit of a problem for the playwright himself because, as a gentle enmity exists between the other actors and himself, he, consequently, is warring with himself. The actor in him doesn't like a line the way the playwright part of him has written it but the trouble is that both sides are stubborn about it. The actor seeks one effect and the playwright derides the effect that the actor is seeking. The actor thinks that certain things and lines could and should be cut; the playwright abhors the thought of any of the immortal lines being shown forever from the hearing of the world. On the stage, the playwright's greatest temptation will be to listen to the way his lines are being spoken by the other actors instead of the playwright.

concentrating on the lines he is speaking himself.

The actor in him wants to murder the director while the playwright applauds the director. Sometimes it is the other way around. So the whole affair is a bit of a thing, if you see what I mean. But it is exciting, interesting, and if you didn't have to suffer twice over it instead of just suffering once, it could be enjoyable.

### After the Show

Then, there is all this after-the-show business. Normally, it is a very difficult thing to go backstage and say how much you liked a show, if you didn't really like it. Most people are not cold-blooded animals and only eccentrics can go back after a show and say, "Honestly, I think it was terrible. You should be shot by the National Guard." So, honest people have recourse to excessive flattery. They have a story to tell in the Abbey Theatre in Dublin, concerning F. J. McCormack, probably the finest actor ever to grace the Abbey boards, who died a few years ago almost in the middle of a play, still a young man.

He and Harry Brogan, another actor, were in their dressing rooms on a Monday night, after playing in a not particularly good play, and two Englishmen came to visit them, speechless with admiration. They said they had been in every theatre in the world and never, never, never had they seen the like of what they had just seen. The two actors were rather pleased. It was Monday night, which is generally depression night in the theatre anyhow, and they left to go home in a rosy sort of glow.

Just outside the theatre they stepped in out of a shower and, as they sheltered there, the two admirers passed by, their heads bent to the rain, one saying to the other, "Wasn't it awful?" They never forgot the lesson. Think, therefore, of the playwright-actor. If a person comes back and praises the actor, the playwright in him bristles. If they praise the play, the actor bristles. It's a complicated business, indeed, but it works out all right in the end and everybody has a good time. But the question always will remain unsolved, is the actor a pain in the neck as a playwright?

## Appendix 4.6

Extracts from Westport Country Playhouse and Booth Theatre Programmes 1954

WEEK OF AUGUST 30th THROUGH SEPTEMBER 4th, 1954

---

Boston Post Road  
Westport

**WESTPORT  
COUNTRY PLAYHOUSE**

Telephone  
Westport CA 7-4177

**THE WESTPORT SEASON OF 1954, INC.**

*Lawrence Langner      Armina Marshall      John C. Wilson*

presents

A THEATRE GUILD-WORTHINGTON MINER PRODUCTION

**WALTER      PEGGY ANN      GLENDA  
MACKEN      GARNER      FARRELL**

*in a new play*

**"HOME IS THE HERO"**

by **MR. MACKEN**

with

**J. PAT O'MALLEY      ART SMITH  
FRANCES FULLER      ANN THOMAS**

Directed by **MR. MINER**

Setting by **MARVIN REISS**

---

ORIGINAL PLAYBILL COVER DESIGN FROM THEATRE ARTS  
BY STEVAN DOHANOS

CAST OF

**"HOME IS THE HERO"**

(In the Order of Their Appearance)

WILLIE O'REILLY .....	RICHARD LUPINO
DAYLIA (Willie's Mother) .....	GLENDA FARRELL
BID (A Tenant) .....	ANN THOMAS
DOVETAIL (Her Husband) .....	J. PAT O'MALLEY
JOSIE (Willie's Sister) .....	PEGGY ANN GARNER
LILY GREEN .....	LORETTA LEVERSEE
TRAPPER .....	ART SMITH
PADDY O'REILLY .....	WALTER MACKEN
MRS. GREEN .....	FRANCES FULLER
MANCHESTER MONAGHAN .....	CHRISTOPHER PLUMMER

## *Who's Who In The Cast*

WALTER MACKEN (Paddo) made his Broadway debut to the applause of the critics in a role he created for the original presentation at the Abbey Theatre, Dublin, — that of the colorful shillelagh-fighter in "The King of Friday's Men", 1951. He began his stage career in a minor capacity with the Little Gaelic Theatre in his native Galway, remaining for eight years in various capacities, manager, producer, director, dramatist and actor. In fact, he started acting at 17, designed and painted scenery for some fifty odd plays, doubled as prop man and filled in wherever needed. He is the author of four plays in Irish and two plays in English, and has to his credit also four novels, "Rain On the Wind" among them. "Home Is The Hero" is the first of his plays to be presented in America; another, "Mungo's Mansion", was performed at the Abbey Theatre, as well as in London, and has been presented in Flemish, Swedish and Danish. When "Home Is the Hero" opened at the Abbey Theatre in Dublin there was a

## *Who's Who In The Cast*

newspaper strike. In spite of the handicap of opening without benefit of publicity or reviews, "Home Is the Hero" succeeded in running longer than any other play in the long and distinguished history of the Abbey Theatre.



# *The Booth Theatre*

—Affiliated Theatre Building Co., Inc.—

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EDW. F. CAVANAGH, JR.  
FIRE COMMISSIONER

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THE • PLAYBILL • A • WEEKLY • PUBLICATION • OF • PLAYBILL • INCORPORATED

Beginning Wednesday Evening, September 22, 1954 •

Matinees Thursday and Saturday

OPENING NIGHT SEPTEMBER 22, 1954

THE THEATRE GUILD and WORTHINGTON MINER

Present

**WALTER  
MACKEN**

**PEGGY ANN  
GARNER**

In A New Play

**HOME IS THE HERO**

by MR. MACKEN

with

**GLEND A FARRELL  
J. PAT O'MALLEY**

**ART SMITH**

**FRANCES FULLER**

**ANN THOMAS**

Directed by MR. MINER

Entire Production Designed by Marvin Reiss

## **CAST**

<b>WILLIE O'REILLY</b>	<b>DONALD HARRON</b>
<b>DAYLIA</b>	<b>GLEND A FARRELL</b>
<b>BID</b>	<b>ANN THOMAS</b>
<b>DOVETAIL</b>	<b>J. PAT O'MALLEY</b>
<b>JOSIE</b>	<b>PEGGY ANN GARNER</b>
<b>LILY GREEN</b>	<b>LORETTA LEVERSEE</b>
<b>TRAPPER</b>	<b>ART SMITH</b>
<b>PADDO O'REILLY</b>	<b>WALTER MACKEN</b>
<b>MRS. GREEN</b>	<b>FRANCES FULLER</b>
<b>MANCHESTER MONAGHAN</b>	<b>CHRISTOPHER PLUMMER</b>



THE IRISH TIMES, TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 2, 1954

# FROM GALWAY TO BROADWAY

## "Home is the Hero"

AS I made my way to the Booth Theatre to see Walter Macken's "Home is the Hero," I found Times Square even more of a mob scene than usual. Two of New York's biggest cinemas, the Victoria and the Paramount, were holding simultaneous premieres of "A Star is Born" at the north and south ends, respectively, of the "square," which is really more like a triangle. In front of each cinema were two scarlet ladders each bearing a giant revolving searchlight which shot its beam into the night sky, lighting up the facade of the building for a moment at every revolution.

Mounded policemen blew whistles to direct the traffic, while foot police allowed only ticket-holders to pass the barriers which kept the sidewalks clear before the cinemas. On the traffic islands in the middle of the square excited crowds milled around, seeking a glimpse of Judy Garland and James Mason, the stars of the show.

I wish I could say that a new star, in the person of Walter Macken, had been born to New York these past few weeks. Alas, it was not so. A colleague who had never been to Ireland accompanied me to "Home is the Hero," which has since closed after a short run—and I was surprised to find that we were both in complete agreement about the play. In contrast to the reviews I had read, we felt that the play was essentially a worthwhile one, but that Mr. Macken, backed by his own handiwork by a monotonous, unimaginative performance. Many of the other members of an excellent cast extracted far more from the lines Mr. Macken had written than he himself did.

### Reviews

Before I go any farther, I had better quote from the opposite viewpoint. Wolcott Gibbs of the *New Yorker* summed up as follows: "All in all, I don't believe the piece at the Booth can be described as much more than a serious and laudable undertaking that somehow fails to accomplish its difficult purpose. At his own confused and belligerent hero, Mr. Macken gives an admirable performance, managing to suggest a great deal more than is apparent in the text."

Brooks Atkinson, in the *New York Times*, while calling it "in the final analysis . . . a dull play about a disagreeable fellow," said: "Mr. Macken plays the part of the bull with skill and force."

Walter Kerr, in the *New York Herald Tribune*, showed more sympathy than the other two reviewers quoted: "There is insight, and an unmistakable theatrical vigour, in

## A Letter from NEW YORK by Vivian Mercier

much of what Mr. Macken has done. But the strident tones of the bully strike a single note, and an irritating one." Mr. Kerr, who is almost unique among drama critics—at least in English-speaking countries—in having a wide practical knowledge of the theatre, also gave praise to Mr. Macken's acting: "As actor—with a tight mouth and cavernous eyes—he has all the roaring authority needed to make Padde O'Reilly a convincing tyrant." Nevertheless, Mr. Kerr put his finger on what I believe to be the major flaw in Mr. Macken's performance, though he attributed it to the author rather than the actor: "His Padde is not a man of special stature; we have never seen him in his merrier days. We know him only as he nags, snarls, whines and commands."

Mr. Kerr is a bad man to disagree with, but I and my colleague believed that the lines were all right; it was Mr. Macken's handling of them that was nearly all wrong. A better-trained or more gifted actor could have suggested, with a smile, a way of walking, and a gesture or two, the latent charm of Padde. Mr. Macken seems obsessed with strength in his plays and novels; it is also the one quality that his acting strives for, at the expense of everything else, including, ultimately, strength itself. Looking back on his performance in "The King of Friday's Men," I can see that, too, suffered from the same monotony and vain pursuit of force.

Mr. Macken's early career was such that he was virtually compelled to teach himself the art of acting, or remain forever ignorant of it. When he reached a wider world than Galway, a certain fame went before him. Many a man in his position would have been too old or too proud to learn anything new. This is hardly true of Mr. Macken, who has unquestionably learned a great deal about writing plays since the tenuous "Mungo's Mansion" diluted enough material for a weak one-act into a full-length play. But as an actor, he lacks all natural endowment for the stage. Seen in a foreign setting, his limitations suddenly became glaringly obvious.

### Bright Future

Having written what I believe to be the unpleasant truth about Mr.

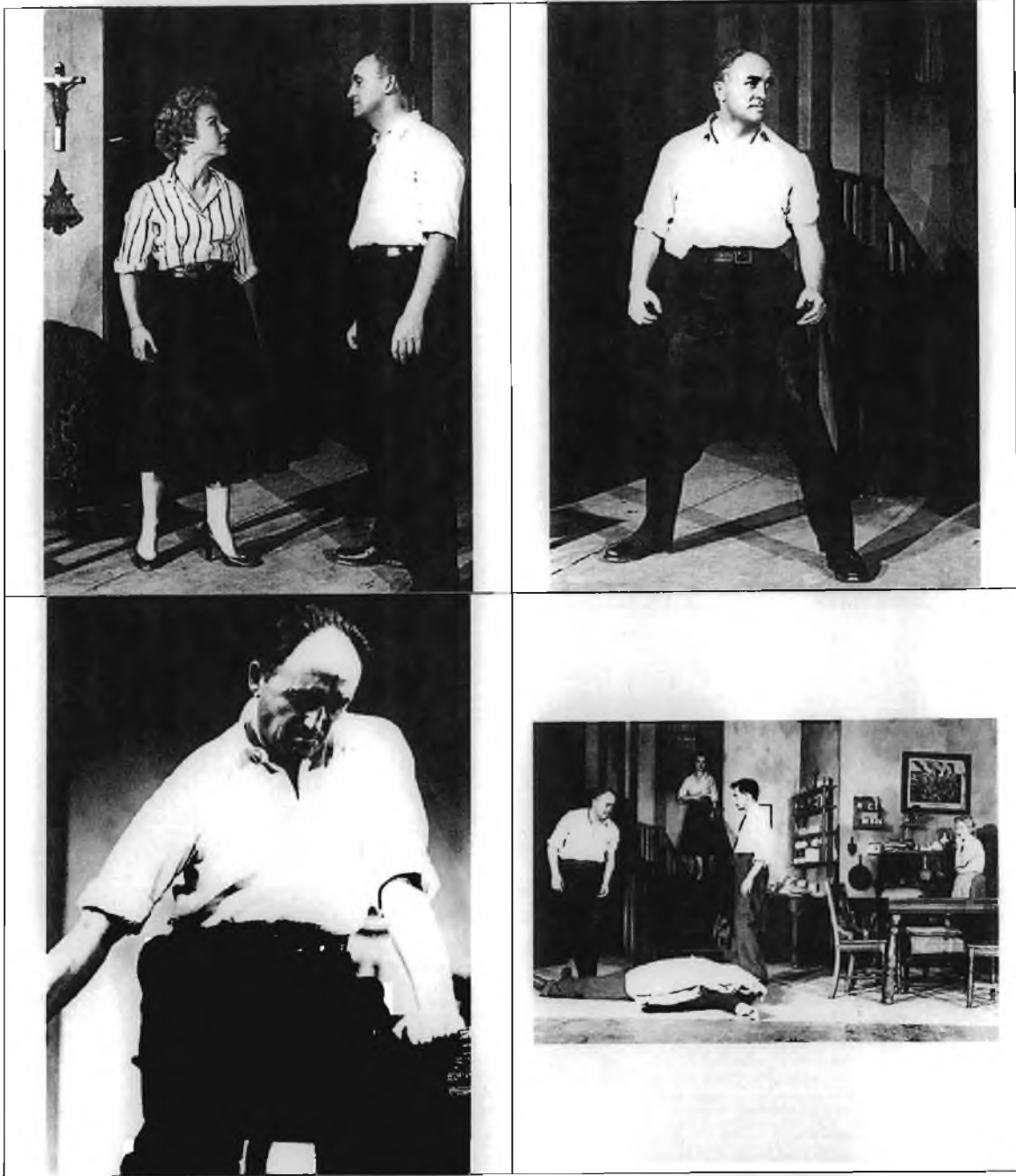
### Bright Future

Having written what I believe to be the unpleasant truth about Mr. Macken's second failure to impress Broadway, I want to write with equal sincerity—and, I hope, truth—about his bright future as a playwright. He may yet prove a worthy successor to Sean O'Casey, with whom the New York critics are prone to compare him to his disadvantage.

The number of striking characterisations given in a play whose mood and tempo were so unmistakably Irish, by a least whose accents never brought them nearer Ireland than Boston—or, at best, Glasgow—was in itself sufficient proof that Mr. Macken, the playwright, has begun to master his craft. My own favourite performances were those of Donald Harron, a young Canadian, as the dripped Willie, and Loretta Leverette, an almost complete newcomer, as his forward sweetheart, Lily Green. But the almost uniform high standard of performance in the supporting roles would have been impossible if the players had not had the right kind of material to work with. Mr. Macken should take heart, also, himself a minor role in his next play, concentrate his undeniable talents on writing rather than acting, and turn his present defeat into a future victory.

## Appendix 4.8

### Photographs from the Broadway production of *Home is the Hero*



**Tom Kenny Collection**

Top Left: Josie and Paddo  
Top Right and Bottom Left: Paddo  
Bottom Right: Paddo, Josie, Willie and Daylia



## Appendix 4.9

CABLES: "PUBLISH, LONDON"  
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ST. MARTIN'S STREET  
LONDON, W.C.2.

Messrs. Macmillan & Co. Ltd. beg

to forward the accompanying cutting from:

Saturday Review of October 1921:

The problems of home preservation are also the subject of Walter Macken's "Home Is the Hero." While the title might seem to be a poetic way of announcing the return of the play's leading character, it actually is a simple declarative statement to the effect that a home is more important than any individual in it.

This theme is borne out by a poor Irish household, whose head is serving five years in jail for killing a man in a brawl. The son, a slightly crippled cobbler, has worked long hours of overtime to keep the shabby home together. When his father comes back to find his wife a tippler, his daughter running around with a "trickey," his son about to marry the daughter of the man he killed, and a disreputable couple living in his house as paying boarders, he tries bullheadedly to repeal the situation. But his son tells him, "This house was all right, and I'm tellin' you now to leave it as it was and if you don't like it you leave it to itself. You destroyed us, but we built oursel' back into what we are now, however poor, and nothing is going to change that." In the end home wins out and Paddo leaves, like Ibsen's Gregers Werle.

Unfortunately, this play, which set

a record when produced by the Abbey Theatre and which reads well in book form, has lost a great deal in its New York production. Except for Mr. Macken's Paddo the Irish melody is forced or inadequate. Worthington Miner's direction is mechanical and treats the play as an interminable series of posed sequences. Keeping the grim story mildly amusing seems to be the approach. As a result, the actors make generally attractive but patently synthetic solo appearances. There is seldom a moment where their good acting instincts can assert themselves to give us a response that seems to come out of the interrelationship of characters. Home may be the hero, but unheroic producers can reduce its proportions until it is barely distinguishable from a unit in a mass housing project.

—HENRY HEWES.

(BUW Folder 57)

## Appendix 4.10

From the Manager's Report dated 30 November 1955 (P24/ 754/ 15, page 2)

It seems to me, however, that the great fault of the play from the point of view of really drawing the public is not its wordiness but that we see no generous or big-hearted side to Dacey Adams whereas actually he would have had to have such a side in addition to his domineering propensities if he was to attain the position and public esteem that he is supposed to have had. The want of generosity meant that the sympathy of the audience was not stirred. There were certain faults in the production but I do not think that they had anything to do with the failure of the play to bring in the public. In view of the small audiences the play has had it is curious that coming out of the theatre in the middle of the crowds one hears people say "It was very good", "It was grand" and so forth. Quite a number of people with theatrical affiliations whom I met during the reception after the Gaiety opening said that they liked it. On Saturday night I sat beside a young doctor in the Stalls. At the beginning of the performance I told him that audiences during the week had been small and indicated to him that I was not particularly enthusiastic about the play. Therefore there was no reason for him to praise it to me out of a sense of politeness. Nevertheless he went out of his way to say how much he had liked it. In view of this I remained in hopes until Tuesday morning that the news spread by Saturday night's audience - the first decently sized audience which the play has had - might result in greater numbers coming to see it this week. Unfortunately there is no sign of improvement.

## Appendix 4.11

Extracts from the reviews by the Irish national papers for:

- A. *Twilight of a Warrior*, 1955
- B. *Look in the Looking Glass*, 1958
- C. *The Voices of Doolin*, 1960
- D. *Recall the Years*, 1966

A. *Twilight of a Warrior* opened at the Abbey Theatre on the 21 November 1955.

*The Irish Times*, 22 November 1955, page 7

*'Twilight of a Warrior*

.... Dacey Adam, the dominant figure of the *Twilight of a Warrior* (Walter Macken's new play at the Abbey this week) should earn the 'Thanks' of the Abbey audience for an author who has brought a new, different, and contemporarily credible character onto the Abbey stage ....

.... The conflict between Adam (who, in this case is most clearly the father of Cain) and Abel is so absorbingly stated that the sometimes too-obvious triteness of the subordinate situations is forgiven in gratitude for a Abbey play which has something of interest to say and which says it with immense theatrical effectiveness.' (K)

*The Irish Press*, 22 November 1955, page 7

'Macken's latest play is his best effort yet

While Mr. Walter Macken's *Twilight of a Warrior* ... must be ranked as his most significant contribution to the theatre to date, it is unlikely to be enjoyed anything like the popularity of his earlier plays. In it Mr. Macken reveals considerable advance towards maturity as a dramatist but in general its very much over-sustained note of tragedy is inclined to pall on an audience, especially one conditioned over so long a period to flighty, superficial comedy.' Dacey Adam '.... is a powerful human study but Mr. Macken introduces too many irrelevant issues, ... and the effect is to blur the picture.

.... But it is essentially the play of a man of the theatre who thinks on the problems facing our society at the moment and it deserves all the higher rating in that it represents a long overdue effort to turn dramatic thought into more worthwhile channels.' (NC)

*The Irish Independent*, 22 November 1955, page 8

'Play of Contradictions

## First Production of *Twilight of a Warrior*

.... its classical theme of the soldier carrying the war into the peace is developed with the lushness of a Victorian novelette; yet the approach to the characters is on the psychoanalytical plane of modern intellectual drama.

... seen as a serious lapse but not the only one is Dacey's method to dissuade Abel from marrying .... It is straining credibility in Dacey too far when his method of defeating this new opponent is to make him, a stranger, a spectator of the most intimate and sordid family row.' (IM)

**B. *Look in the Looking Glass*** opened at the Abbey Theatre on the 10 May 1958.

*The Irish Times*, 11 March 1958, page 4

### 'New Macken Comedy at the Abbey Theatre

.... The audience, apart from myself, appeared to enjoy it without reservation. Nevertheless, though in a minority of one, I cannot blame the coldness of my feelings exclusively on the ambient snow. The play's first act is short and funny, the second short, skimpy and disjointed, and the third falls back on Mr. Macken's old and apparently abandoned resource – physical violence.

.... I am an unreasonable admirer of his talents, and I hope that this villainously titled play, whatever its popular success, represents merely an off-moment.' (MK)

*The Irish Press*, 11 March 1958, page 6

### 'New play by Macken develops fine theme

Here we have a fine theme, which he handles admirably, although the customary Macken sparkle is often lacking in the writing and there is quite an amount of unnecessary repetition.

But in the Gombeen man, who can trim his sail to any and every controversy, Mr. Macken has created a brilliant character who really gives the play its backbone.' (NC)

Niall Carroll also gives the play a mention in his 'Theatre Column' on the 10 March 1958, page 6. 'So Mr. Macken gives us a look at ourselves in the mirror and we naturally don't like the way we appear. It's a daring theme ...'

*The Irish Independent*, 11 March 1958, page 14

### 'Abbey stages new play by Walter Macken.

.... He is too thoughtful a writer however to escape altogether from the acid of his underlying satire; and one is left with the feeling that the characters which he has

so surely and so realistically created could say much more if given more plausible situations to cope with.

Still, in spite of a sometimes annoying repetitiousness it is all very disarming and it provides the Abbey players with roles ... they handle in their best naturalistic manner.' (IM)

**C. *The Voices of Doolin*** opened at the Gaiety Theatre on the 15 September 1960.

*The Irish Times*, 16 September 1960, page 9

'*The Voices of Doolin* at the Gaiety

The influence of Henrik Ibsen lies heavily on *The Voices of Doolin*, the skill of the old master-builder, unfortunately does not. This is all the more surprising since the author, Walter Macken, is a journeyman of the theatre with many years experience behind him so that in the Gaiety last night one expected a tautly constructed play and not a rambling tract on the evils of alcoholism with fairly audible echoes more reminiscent of *The Drunkard* than *The Dolls House*.' (K)

*The Irish Press*, 16 September 1960, page 4

'Dublin Theatre Festival

Last night on the stage of the Gaiety Theatre we saw a character who, I venture to suggest, will live in Irish Theatre. This was the character of Doolin, the doll maker, in Walter Macken's very significant contribution to the Dublin Theatre Festival, *The Voices of Doolin*.

Despite its many weaknesses, the play is a success because the character of Doolin is drawn with such splendid strokes that it fills Mr. Macken's stage canvas to the dwarfing of much that is trivial, if not naive.

Mr. Macken has not any finer writing than in the creation of Doolin and Cyril Cusack has seldom acted more impressively ...' (MM)

*The Irish Independent*, 16 September 1960, page 6

'New Macken play a vehicle for Cusack

Walter Macken wrote *The Voices of Doolin* especially for Cyril Cusack and it is Mr. Cusack's play for 95 percent of the way. .... There is none of the old Macken violence in this work. Instead there is a study of an alcoholic's struggle to rehabilitate himself and the inner strife and turbulence which goes with it.

**Footnote:**

The Irish Times carries a fine photograph of Cyril Cusack as Doolin on its front page. It also lists the full cast but not the parts they play other than indicating Maureen O'Sullivan and John McDarby as the old retainers and Jack Aronson as the efficiency expert (Morgan). The Irish Press carries a photograph of Mr. and Mrs Macken with Lord and Lady Killanin on page 9.



.... Despite some passages of fine dialogue, Mr. Macken's build-up to this crisis is cumbersome and flagging and allows the pace to slacken to the danger point ....' (DR)

**D. *Recall the Years***, opening programme for the new Abbey Theatre, 18 July 1966

The accounts of the opening of the new Abbey are quoted in Hunt (1979, 195) and Welch (1999, 179) and the reports in the national daily papers were the sources. This was a double celebration of the Abbey history up to the time of the fire and The Abbey Theatre's return 'home'.

All the papers covered the event and commented on the opening show.

*The Irish Times*, 19 July 1966, pages 1 and 9

Seamus Kelly on page 9 concluded his review as follows:

'The show will need pruning and quicker timing but for a first night and under the stresses and strains that this first night involved, it was pretty creditable and very, very nostalgic.'

*The Irish Independent*, 19 July 1966, pages 10 and 11

'Programme at the Abbey full of memories

Desmond Rushe, its Theatre Critic, remarked on the content of the show on the difficulty in deciding what to leave out (page 11).

'In the circumstances his [Macken's] choice of material is generally excellent .... But throughout the presentation the company shows what an amount of talent it has in both acting and production...'

*The Irish Press*, 19 July 1966, front page and page 4

'The Abbey is fittingly reborn' is the front page headline in the Irish Press, with a subheading 'Distinguished audience greets major literary event'. Macken is not mentioned in the front page story and is not in the photograph. On page 4, under the heading 'New theatre stages its 70 year history' *Recall the Years* is reviewed.

'.... Walter Macken has utilised all the available resources for his chronicle .... It is a remarkable achievement that he has managed to include all the occurrences of major importance... ....All in all it is an entertaining chronicle. (CC)

Appendix 4.12(a)

**8.15 Sunday Night Theatre**

**Henry Sherek presents  
Liam Redmond, Sonia Dresdel  
Stephen Boyd in**

**' TWILIGHT  
OF A WARRIOR '**

**by Walter Macken**

*Cast in order of appearance:*

Affy Adam.....Harry Hutchinson  
Elva Adam.....Brenda Hogan  
Abel Martin.....Stephen Boyd  
Gubby Adam.....Maureen Delaney  
Dacey Adam.....Liam Redmond  
Nessa Adam.....Sonia Dresdel  
Doctor Gilanders.....Kevin Stoney  
Ross Adam.....Alec McCowen  
Sergeant Bruđar.....Tony Quinn

**Directed by John Jacobs**

**Designer, Barry Learoyd**

**Produced by Michael Barry**

**The action of the play takes place on  
an autumn evening in Ireland. The  
time is the present**

**(Stephen Boyd appears by courtesy of  
London Films, Ltd.)**

(BUW, Folder 41)

## Appendix 4.12(b)

### CAMERA SCRIPT

Henry Shorek presents

"TWILIGHT OF A WARRIOR"

by

Walter Macken

---

Produced by Michael Barry

Directed by John Jacobs

#### CAST:

DACEY ADAM .....	LIAM REDMOND
NESSA ADAM .....	SONIA DRESDEL
ELVA ADAM .....	BRENDA HOGAN
ROSS ADAM .....	ALEC MCCOWEN
AFY ADAM .....	HARRY HUTCHINSON
GUBBY ADAM .....	MAUREEN DELANEY
ABEL MARTIN .....	STEPHEN BOYD
DR. HECTOR GILANDERS ....	KEVIN STONEY
SERGEANT BRUDAR .....	TONY QUINN

Designer: Barry Learoyd

#### STUDIO D

CAMERA REHEARSALS: Saturday, 7th April, 1956. 2.0 - 10.0 p.m.

Sunday, 8th April, 1956 12.0 - 1.0 p.m.  
2.0 - 7.0 p.m.

TRANSMISSION: Sunday, 8th April 1956 8.15 - 9.45 p.m.

P.A: Morris Barry  
Assistant: Sylvia Rich  
A.F.M: Prudence Fitzgerald

T.O.M: O. Eddy  
L.S: E. Monk  
Crew: 8

Wardrobe: Sheila Glassford  
Makeup: Jill Summers

ON 2

Hold shot as  
Abel comes down R

1 on B  
Abel

DACEY: (cont) ~~who is going to~~  
~~make all that blood, that flowed~~  
~~for a cause, fertilize the race~~  
~~so that a man's dreams and struggles~~  
~~have not been in vain? Tell me~~  
~~who is going to do all that, Abel?~~

ABEL: A man called God.

DACEY: The Black Eminence again.  
He keeps bringing in God.

ABEL: Are you feeling well, Mister  
Adam?

as Dacey turns

196. CAM 4.B - 24

High XDU DACEY

DACEY: I feel like a fellow  
walking on a great plain with  
vapours flowing around my feet.  
Look, Abel, go out to Elva. I don't  
know what's come over me. I'm  
letting you win, Abel. You hear.  
I feel I am doing the wrong thing,  
and I am doing it against my  
reason, but I'm doing it. Go and  
let somebody get something out of  
the day. Maybe I'm repaying Mary  
Ann too late, I don't know, but  
go now, before I change my mind  
and think up a million reasons  
why I was right.

197. CAM 2.A - 24

as Abel moves

2 shot

ABEL: (still looking at him  
anxiously) All right, Mister Adam.  
Thank you.

Hold Dacey L f/g

& Abel up to R b/g

~~DACEY: We have so little time.~~  
~~ABEL: What are sixty years?~~  
~~Just a flash. The time we lived~~  
~~to be nine hundred. That was age.~~  
~~You had time to think things out.~~  
~~Not just this. It's all so cut~~  
~~down. (He has his back to ABEL:~~  
~~his face to the ceiling: his eyes~~  
~~screwed up) Abel, where are you?~~

ABEL: I'm here, Mister Adam.

DACEY: Well, don't go. Don't  
go for a minute. I want ...  
(He calls out) Abel!

Let Dacey drop out of  
shot

198. CAM 1.B - 24

as he drops

Single ABEL.

Pull back and pan him R  
to Dacey

Hold action - pan L and pull  
back to 2 shot on couch

(And before ABEL can reach him,  
he falls on his face as if his  
left leg had collapsed under  
him as it has. He is half  
lying on his face, when ABEL  
reaches him)

ABEL: (half raising him in his  
arms) Mister Adam! Mister Adam!



ON 1

(DACEY slowly raises his right hand and moves the fingers)

DACEY: The couch, Abel, on the couch.

(His voice is muffled as if he had to speak out of one side of his mouth, as he has. ABEL raises him, gets him half sitting, half lying, on the couch. The left side of DACEY's face is distorted. His right hand moves over his heart)

Abel, listen, I'm afraid.

ABEL: No need. You'll be all right. I'll have to call them. We'll do something.

DACEY: No. Don't go, Abel. No use, see. Caught up with me. All my left side, nothing, Abel. Nothing at all.

ABEL: That's shock, Mister Adam. Too many things in one day.

Abel - put a cushion behind me.

Hold action as  
Abel breaks L

DACEY: ~~Pull me up better. Prop me up straight. Tell you something, Abel, can't see, either. Eyes gone. Listen. Not Elva. Not her. Get the others.~~

ABEL: ~~I'll get them. (He goes to the door; calls ARRY)~~

DACEY: Abel, are you glad to see me like this?

ABEL: (halting on his way to the other door) Oh, no, Mister Adam! Oh, no. (He calls GUBBY; comes back)

DACEY: (his groping right hand has found ABEL) You were giving in to me, Abel. Now I know. You saw death in my face, through the eyes of Mary Ann.

(ABEL is saved from a reply by the appearance of GUBBY)

GUBBY: ~~I think of all the lovely food spoiled. I ask why God doesn't punish us. (She sees DACEY on the couch. She rushes down to him) Dacey! Dacey! What's wrong with you? What's wrong with you?~~

77

ON 1

DACEY: (contd) Glad you came, Abel.  
Now go - go out to Elva.

ABEL: I'll stay here with you.

DACEY: No. This is the last battle.  
You tell Elva you have won a victory.  
Please go to her, Abel.

ABEL: All right, I will go if that is  
what you want.

DACEY: Good man. Be good to Elva. If not,  
wherever I am I will come for you.

ll back to hold Dacey  
ttom L of frame and  
el walking to French windows

RISE ABEL: I'll be good to Elva. Goodbye Dacey.

as he reaches windows

CAM 4.D - 24 o.v.  
Single ABEL ELVA: Abel.

Pan him R. Elva into shot  
from behind camera

Hold shot as he takes her out R

Track in slowly to B.P.

GO GRAMS

/I

CAM 3 on END ROLLER

ROLL CAPTIONS

FADE CAMERA 3

FADE SOUND AND VISION



## Appendix 4.13

The Irish Times review of the Sunday Night Theatre presentation of *Twilight of a Warrior*, screened on the 8 April 1956

THE IRISH TIMES, THURSDAY, APRIL 12, 1956

# GOOD PLAYS AND BAD

tation, com-  
I.T.A. had  
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nd trivial

a mistaken  
for triviality  
is unendur-  
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his temper.  
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been shown,  
ficult" plays

two plays that demanded close attention and a serious effort on the viewer's part to share the authors' viewpoints. The result on these two occasions has been that the hours have gone quickly by, with none of that tedium inseparable from most "light" television entertainment. It is the flippant romantic farces that turn to sweet pudding on the little screen.

\* \* \*

The play given on Sunday night was "Twilight of a Warrior," by Walter Macken. This piece had a tentative run at the Abbey last autumn, was praised by the critics, and faded from sight after two or three weeks. It deserved a better fate, and its comparative failure

## TELEVISION

### REVIEW

by G. A. Olden

must be set down to the audiences' frustration at being denied the kind of jackass comedy that Mr. Macken dispensed liberally in such plays as "Mungo's Mansion."

"Twilight of a Warrior" is an intensely serious piece of work, a study of an ex-man of action who has degenerated into a bully, grafter and domestic despot. The play lies in the resolution of tension between this Dacey Adam and the hard, clean innocent young man who wants to marry his daughter.

The verbal battle between these two is full of insult, vitality and a common enough type of petty cruelty disguised as badinage. Indeed the slanging-matches between Dacey and Abel Martin (who has inhuman self-possession and never taunts back) engross our attention so fully that the melodramatic twists of the plot are apt to strike us as stagey interruptions of the real drama. The ending is neat, theatrically effective and consistent with the characters presented by Mr. Macken, who has written easily his finest play.

Liam Redmond and Stephen Boyd had the two plum rôles and revelled in them. Sonia Dresdel is an actress who uses her brains all the time, but she was miscast as Nessa Adam. Tony Quinn was comfortably within his range in the small part of Sergeant Brudar. Michael Barry's production undoubtedly highlighted the right faces at the right moments, but it was too static for television.

\* \* \*

The week's other memorable presentation was "Wild Decem-

improvise Miss outraged probably

It was inevitable should emerge a figure. She was to travel, to go albeit briefly, and So it is hard to for concentrating the expense of the original younger well be that no could successfully sonality of the air "Wuthering He would be a feat

Branwell, also i a bit of a bore painting and ra Anne's personality at all. Miss Dane she has given us of Charlotte, both like. In this she v by the performa Pryor, a solemn l of the most ex television. Miss radiantly in syn character that on her for lacking G sive plainness.

\* \* \*

Next week we vicarious guests at wedding. When th hope to report on tions; meanwhile, fine for us.



## Appendix 4.14



Guthán  
Oifig na dTicéad 44606  
Oifig an Rúnai 43412

### AMHARCLANN NA MAINISTREACH BLEÁ CLIATH, C.8. ABBEY THEATRE, DUBLIN.

*Dáta* 26th., March, 1958.

*Stiurthóir:* LEAMHNACH ROBASTÚN, RISTEARD Ó h-AODHA.  
EARNAN DE BLAGHD, ROIBEARD Ó FARACHAIN  
*Bainisteoir Stiurtha:* EARNAN DE BLAGHD  
*Rúnai:* ERIC GORMAN

Walter Macken Esq.,  
Gort na Ganiv,  
Oughterard,  
CO. GALWAY.

Dear Walter,

I am still at a loss to know why such a relatively small proportion of those who saw LOOK IN THE LOOKING GLASS really liked it. It started under a disadvantage because of the bad weather on the opening night and because the main crowd of first nighters were at the Gaiety seeing the Casement play, which had got such publicity. But I knew we should have good audiences on Saturday 15th., March and on St. Patrick's Day and I hoped that in a full house the play would give more pleasure and that it would have better support during its second week. When I saw, on Tuesday 18th., March, however, that booking was actually down I had to come to the decision that the play could not run more than the fortnight.

Looking at it during the ~~first~~ <sup>fortnight</sup> I thought we might have done a little better with the casting. If we had put Tom McKenna in as Mico, he would have given a little touch of whimsicality to the part which might have helped

it. Joan O'Hara was very good as Janey mid-way through rehearsals but thereafter she grew too tense and in actual performance was not at all as good as I hoped she would be or as she had been as Lily Green in HOME IS THE HERO. Only that Maire O'Donnell was not up and about after her fourth baby when we began rehearsals of LOOK IN THE LOOKING GLASS we should probably have cast her as Janey and, in some places at least, she would have been better than Joan. I do not think, however, that failure to please the general public was due, in any very great degree to the fault of the actors. When I questioned about a dozen people as to why they did not care much for the play I was sometimes given no tangible reason and sometimes informed that they could not accept Mico's ignorance of his neighbours. Several women said they disliked the fighting.

I practically never let anyone see a script except at the request of the author and, in view of what you say, I shall rigidly refuse in the case of LOOK IN THE LOOKING GLASS.

Yours sincerely,

*Cannon de Blaghd*



# Appendix 4.15

## THE MIRROR OF HOMER ~~HOMER IN THE MIRROR~~

ALL HAIL HOMER. Richard D. Mangan.

HOMER. ~~Richard Mangan~~ <sup>unipers</sup> Mico (Michael) Longman. Snow Sweeten.

MOTHER. Mary Mangan.

FATHER. Peter Mangan.

"The Pokey in Postman's"

~~GRANDFATHER.~~

GIRL. Joan Mullen Mullen.

BINSHEEN. Fuhenty

CLADDABAWN.

PRIEST. - Just Father.

TURLOC O'Connor.

SARAH. Stenon. stoppen Callins

(GOMBEEEN) & DAUGHTER. Sineen.

Cealann. Tierney

his old-fashioned  
still means h.d.

Leapside.



# FILMS ★ PLAYS ★

Tom Hennigan  
is your guide

# WALTER MACKEN TRIUMPHS

**WALTER MACKEN** has done it. At one bound he's up there, sitting securely amongst the world's top screen actors. That's our firm opinion after seeing "Home is the Hero" at Dublin's Savoy Cinema.

For some years, Mr. Macken's talent for putting Galway folk (amongst whom he was born) on the Abbey stage or between the covers of a book has shone with a steady brilliance.

His first Abbey play, "Mungo's Mansion" gave the late F. J. McCormick one of his greatest roles.

Then came "Vacant Possession," and soon a lot of people were calling this powerfully built Connacht writer-actor with the gentle manner "the O'Casey of Galway."

After that there was "Hodie is The Hero" in which the author created the role of Paddy, the central character, for the Abbey boards.

Writers must keep on writing. Mr. Macken turned his attention to novels. We got "Quench the Moon," "The Bogman," "I Am Alone," and "Rain On The Wind." The last-named was the "Daily Graphic" Book Choice, World's Book Choice and the Book of the Month in America.

Mr. Macken followed his acting to Galway's famed Theatre where he has captured the spirit of William Macken.

His appearance on the Abbey stage has been too few, but here he is at last in his first screen role. And what a performance it is!

Mr. Macken comes over with the impact of first-hand police. Everything about him looks you passed in your seat—his voice, appearance, and gestures.

It must be the finest voice to reach the screen in many a decade. It can swell like a

mighty organ and then become hushed until you can hear a pin drop in the auditorium.

Walter Macken's Paddy will surely rank as one of the greatest characterisations the screen has ever given us. Poor Paddy! Think of a double ditch, as we say in the West; middle house fool; street angel; house devil.

To Ardmore studios in Bray for the most exacting role of his career came Hollywood top-gun Arthur Kennedy to play Paddy's son, Willie, who sadly subdues his father into a realisation of his rightful place as husband and father.

Kennedy is so good that it is hard to realise he is not an Abbey actor. This is an extraordinary performance and

one which enhances Kennedy's already formidable reputation.

Eileen Crowe as Paddy's wife is a moving, tragic figure, and she is very well supported by Joan O'Hara as her daughter.

All the smaller roles are perfectly filled by such Abbey "greats" as Harry Brogan and Maire Keane, Maire O'Donnell, Philip O'Flynn, Patrick Laye, Eddie Golden, John Hoey, Michael Hennessy, Michael O'Brien and Geoffrey Golden. Pike actor Dermot Kelly is also there.

"Home Is The Hero" will shed lustre on everybody who has a hand in it. It will bring Ardmore into the front rank of film factories.

THE SUNDAY PRESS, APRIL 26, 1950

See page ii for an extract from this report.

Excerpt from the Hennigan Sunday Press Article:

mighty organ and then become hushed until you can hear a pin drop in the auditorium.

Walter Macken's Paddo will surely rank as one of the greatest characterisations the screen has ever given us. Poor Paddo! Thick as a double ditch, as we say in the West; public house fool; street angel, house devil.

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"Home Is The Hero" will shed lustre on everybody who has a hand in it. It will bring Ardmore into the front rank of film factories.

*The Evening Herald* on Tuesday, 17 February 1959, carried a report on the film under the heading 'Special showing of Ardmore film' with a photograph of Walter Macken. The micro film copy is unsuitable for reproduction.

The Cast and Credits:

**ARTHUR KENNEDY**  
IN  
**Home Is The Hero**

by **WALTER MACKEN**

Screenplay by **HENRY KEATING.**

Produced by **ROBERT S. BAKER** and **MONTY BERMAN.**

Directed by **J. FIELDER COOK.**

An **Emmet Dalton** Production.

Made at **Ardmore Studios.**

Distributed by **British Lion Films.**

---

**Cast**

<b>Paddo</b>	<b>WALTER MACKEN</b>
<b>Daylia</b>	<b>EILEEN CROWE</b>
<b>Willie</b>	<b>ARTHUR KENNEDY</b>
<b>Josie</b>	<b>JOAN O'HARA</b>
<b>Maura Green</b>	<b>MAIRE O'DONNELL</b>
<b>Dovetail</b>	<b>HARRY BROGAN</b>
<b>Bid</b>	<b>MAIRE KEANE</b>
<b>Trapper</b>	<b>PHILIP O'FLYNN</b>
<b>Mr. Green</b>	<b>PATRICK LAYDE</b>
<b>Mr. Shannon</b>	<b>EDDIE GOLDEN</b>
<b>Finegan</b>	<b>JOHN HOEY</b>
<b>Manchester Monaghan</b>	<b>MICHAEL HENNESSY</b>
<b>First Pub Customer</b>	<b>MICHAEL O'BRIAIN</b>
<b>Second Pub Customer</b>	<b>DERMOT KELLY</b>
<b>O'Connor</b>	<b>GEOFFREY GOLDEN</b>

Running time—80 minutes.

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DROGHEDA INDEPENDENT, 9 SHOP STREET, DROGHEDA

## Appendix 4.17

N.Y. TIMES REVIEW | HOME IS THE HERO

### **'Home Is the Hero' Opens at Fifth Avenue: Arthur Kennedy Seen in Irish-Made Film Movie Based on Play by Walter Macken**

By **BOSLEY CROWTHER**

Published: January 26, 1961

IF brave, conscientious performing were all it took to make an interesting film from a play that has little to recommend it, then the film that has been made from Walter Macken's "Home Is the Hero" might be worth our recommending that you see. For this Irish-made drama of life in Ireland, which came to the Fifth Avenue Cinema yesterday, is played with conspicuous devotion by Arthur Kennedy and a clearly Irish cast.

Everybody works, including father—father being the role that is played by Mr. Macken himself and around which the whole dismal, dogged drama turns. Ponderously, piously, patly, Mr. Macken performs a stupid man who almost ruins himself and his whole family by his sheer donkey-dense stupidity. And Mr. Kennedy, Joan O'Hara and the Abbey Players' wonderful Eileen Crowe demonstrate with remarkable perseverance the agony he causes those nearest and dearest to him.

Mr. Kennedy smolders hotly as a frustrated crippled son who hates the poverty his stupid father has brought upon them by being jailed for accidentally killing a man in a bar room brawl. Miss O'Hara burns with pride and passion as the daughter whom her father tries to stop from a decent romance with a bookmaker when he gets out of jail. And Miss Crowe gives a touching exhibition of a lowing, patient wife who knows the weakness of her husband and tries to help him in his darkest, bitterest hours.

But, unfortunately, their poignant agonizing goes pretty well for naught because



it seems so completely nonessential by the premise of the play. The father is an irredeemable donkey, deserving of no sympathy. Then why should anybody be concerned with or affected by him?

In real life, there might be some reason. But Mr. Macken has failed in his play—and Henry Keating has failed in His screen play—to clarify it and give it a point. There is no sense of benighted background, of the cruel grip of poverty or any other peculiar circumstances that have affected these people's fates. It simply looks as if Mr. Macken has filched some characters from Sean O'Casey and J. M. Synge and tried to tumble them in a drama without the substance of compelling tragedy.

Harry Brogan gives a fair imitation of the late F. J. McCormack as a spindly sychophant and Maire Kean plays his lanky wife with fervor, but there's no purpose in what they do. They are simply other stupid people dancing attendance on a dunce.

The Cast:

**HOME IS THE HERO**, screen play by Henry Keating, from the play by Walter Macken: directed by J. Fielder Cook; produced by Robert S. Baker and Monty Berman; presented by Show Corporation of America. At the Fifth Avenue Cinema, Fifth Avenue and Thirteenth Street. Running time: eighty-three minute.

Willie . . . . . Arthur Kennedy

Paddo . . . . . Walter Macken

Dovetail . . . . . Harry Brogan

Daylia . . . . . Eileen Crowe

Josie . . . . . Joan O'Hara

Maura Green . . . . . Maire O'Donnell

Bid . . . . . Maire Kean

Trapper . . . . . Philip O'Flynn

Mr. Green . . . . . Patrick Layde

Mr. Shannon . . . . . Eddie Golden

Finegan . . . . . John Hoey

Manchester Monaghan . . . . . Michael Hennessy



## REVIEWING STAND By ARCHER WINSTEN

### 'Home Is the Hero' at 5 Av. Cinema

When "Home Is the Hero" failed on Broadway six years ago, it was considered "a dull play about a disagreeable fellow," "ineffectual," and lacking in Irish bounce.

The picture, now at the Fifth Avenue Cinema, has added many things: an introduction which shows Paddy O'Reilly, the Gollath of Galway, in his barroom heyday instead of letting the audience meet him in the bitterness of his return home from prison, a full cast of Abbey Theater players, and that astonishingly forceful American actor, Arthur Kennedy in the role of the crippled son. **Play Improved**

All of these changes make a difference specifically aimed at the criticisms of the play, almost as if they had been so intended. And, finally, the pessimism of the play, with the father leaving his home again, is changed to a scene in which he learns the error of his ways. This is not too saccharine for the traffic, partly because it is balanced by the bitter human brews that have preceded and which so dominated that play that they have caused a degree of revulsion.

The original values are still there. Author Walter Macken plays the father and bully with a wonderfully right sense of pride, physical strength and the stubbornness for one who must dominate. Opposed to him is the crippled son, Arthur Kennedy, who refuses either to be dominated further or permanently prejudiced.

#### Irish—Perfect Performers

To be sure, there are some more than familiar figures from the Irish world of the theater. Here's Harry Brogan as Dove-tail, doing his own version of the character this country first knew as Harry Fitzgerald, the barroom boaster, hanger on and public speaker. Here's Eileen Crowe as the patient wife, Maire

### "Home Is the Hero"

A Show Corporation release. An Emmett O'Brien production. Produced by Robert S. Baker and Monty Berman. Directed by Fielder Cook. Screenplay by Henry Keating. Play by Walter Macken. The cast: Arthur Kennedy, Walter Macken, Harry Brogan, Eileen Crowe, Joan O'Hara, Maire O'Donnell, Maire Kean, Philip O'Flynn, Patrick Layde, Eddie Golden, John Hovey, Michael Fiennessy, Michael O'Brien, Dermot Kelly and Geoffrey Golden. 82 minutes.

Kean as the hatchet-faced wife of Brogan, Joan O'Hara as the sister, and a dozen other Irish-perfect performers. These are the people who have practically invented the Irish in the Abbey Theater, or at least shown them in flamboyant colors to the world. They all sound like John Millington Synge characters.

#### Another Kennedy Wins

The way in which the American actor Arthur Kennedy fits into this tight little group is as good a way as the many others of repeating the well known fact that this is an actor without limitation, an actor of conviction so deep, technique so solidly grounded that he never seems to be acting.

Granted, the character of the play, all-Irish and a post bag wide, is not new, and the theme, the connoissance of a bully boy, is nothing to write home about, still the quality and feeling of the picture are not to be lightly dismissed. This is one of the fine, serious films of the period. It fights and wrestles its subject down to the ground, and you feel it.

The picture has a much stronger effect than the play seemed to have, even after making allowance for the severity of theater critics and the comparatively sweet dispositions of those who review movies as a profession.

## Appendix 4.19

Sketch is of the set for *The Voices of Doolin* and prepared by Macken. This accompanies the handwritten script in BUW Folder 40. It is dated 28 January 1959.





## Appendix 4.20

Some reviews of the film *The Quare Fellow*.

*The Sunday Independent*, 30 September 1962

**FILMS**

long takes, and the uneasy feeling that the makers had the television screen in mind.

The scenes written in for the new character of the "Quare Fella's" wife (played by a self-conscious Sylvia Syms) are too inept to be true. Patrick McGloohan makes a bloodless young warden and only Walter Macken as the warden who loathes hangings (a deeply-felt performance), and Dermot Kelly (as the warden who loathes Macken) redeem the picture.

This sort of film bears out what I said about Irish film-making last Sunday. It does nothing for Ireland and nothing for the art of the cinema. Not a damn. Running time — 1 hour 30 minutes.

**FIDDLES**

I SUGGEST the people who made "The Quare Fellow" (or is it "Fella"? go along see Peter Graham — beautifully photographed of Mike POT —

with sic in i cast as the d Lea mother. d to all.

minutes — 1 hour, 33

**WOEFUL**

HAVING seen **THE QUARE FELLA** (or is it **FELLOW**? — the cinema and the distributors should make their minds up) at the Savoy, I begin to wonder how it ever got into a film festival.

No doubt Brendan Behan felt passionately about the problem (or the evil) of capital punishment. But with the exception of the final scene, his play doesn't do much to convince. As Arthur Dreyfuss presents it on the screen it is woefully unimaginative and carries all the marks of a second feature: skimpy sets,

**SAVOY** 2.10. 645 4.30. 9.10

PATRICK MCGLOOHAN  
SYLVIA SYMS  
WALTER MACKEN  
HARRY BROGAN

Brendan Behan's  
**The QUARE FELLA**

PERSONS UNDER 18 NOT ADMITTED

*The Evening Press*, 29 Sept. 1962

## SAVOY *Evening Press* 29'62 **The Quare Fella**

THEY'VE taken the Behan out of it and I don't like the result at all. People who had seen the play could quite easily have gone home without realising that the author was against capital punishment. It was subtle, if you know what I mean, a background deeply serious theme to a surface comedy of manners concerning men in jail.

But the film drives home its point about capital punishment with a sledge-hammer. It's battered into you from the start. In fact, you might be better off with a pamphlet on the subject.

And the Quare Fella has a beautiful wife. Sylvia Syms may be Britain's highest paid film actress, but this isn't her part. She uses the bad words that are put into her mouth as if for the first time, drinks, but never looks drunk and . . . well, Brendan had the right idea when he left women out of the cast.

There are the pub scenes without which no Ardmore production seems to be complete, two women fighting on the floor ("Oh, the wild Irish!") and . . . the jokes fall flat. "An Evening With Brendan Behan" at the Gate this week reminded me of how funny the play was.

No, under-eighteens, you're not missing anything this time. "The Quare Fella" is mainly for export.

The Irish Times, 1 October 1962

## FILMS

By David Nowlan

# Without the C

ALL in all, it's a great week behind bars for the regular film-goer, what with two feature films set in men's prisons and a third in Mad Medina's torture chamber. The odd thing about the two prison films (even when both are seen in one afternoon) is that their relative successes vary in almost exact proportion with the length of time that each spend inside the prison walls. There may be no connection between these two factors, but it seems worth mentioning. Certainly it should not be necessary to create a claustrophobic atmosphere when making a good prison film: but, when one thinks of it, most of the best of them never moved outside the prison walls at all.

That said, the two new films have much in common. Both are based on stage plays: "The Pot Carriers" (Adelphi) on the play by Mike Watts and "The Quare Fellow" (Savoy) on the play by Brendan Behan. I suspect that the former stays closer to its original. I know that the latter has virtually nothing to do with the play we saw in Dublin (except perhaps in so far as, like the play, it succeeds in stating a strong emotional case against capital punishment). Both films open with almost identical scenes, the first with a train approaching London to discharge a passenger who makes his way (via the Old Bailey) to jail, the second with a train approaching Dublin to discharge a passenger who makes his way to "the City Prison." In the first, the passenger becomes a prisoner, in the second a warder.

But "The Pot Carriers" stays for virtually all its time inside the walls, watching with humour, sympathy and a certain amount of perception the various antics, trusies, and prisoners, while "The Quare Fellow" gads about through the city streets and pubs, dissipating the almost documentary-like atmosphere of the prison which it wishes only episodically. Granted that there might have been a more serious moral intent in the Irish work and that its failure is possibly

on a higher level than the success of its British rival, "The Pot Carriers" is a much better piece of film-making and an infinitely more satisfactory piece of entertainment.

Briefly, it concerns the first months in jail of a first offender, sentenced to twelve months for attacking the bloke who was messing with his girl. He is drafted to work in the prison kitchen and we watch him and his companions—all of them regular inhabitants—scrape sometimes in high comedy, sometimes with serious introspection, through everyday prison life.

The atmosphere is cosy and comfortable and what moralising the author may give us is well sugar-coated with matey British humour. Indeed, although I don't think the film would call itself a comedy, it is one of the most genuinely funny films we have had from Britain for some time, and it is admirably played by the entire cast for whatever comedy may be going.

Particularly successful in this respect is Ronald Fraser as the trusty, due for release, who has organised a veritable hotel service for his buddies during his four-year sojourn and who hates the idea of giving up thievery, since every potential theft is a challenge to him. Davy Kaye makes an admirable lieutenant to this organising genius and Dennis Price turns in one of the funniest variations of his suave performance.

But whatever of its comedy, "The Pot Carriers" is well written, well constructed and well directed, and carries a load of simple—but nonetheless valuable—philosophy and common sense. Above all, it conveys the idea that its characters, whatever their eccentricities, are real and human—even if some of them seem more articulate than we might expect in petty thieves and thugs.

What a surprising contrast then to find their counterparts in "The Quare Fellow" poor speakers and philosophers in comparison. What are the words that—according to Kenneth Tynan—Behan can "used

out, flushed and ribald, spoiling for a fight"? All of them seem to have been scrubbed out by a thin nasty romance between Warder Crimmin and the wife of the quare fellow—condemned to hang under Crimmin's own eye. By what odd chance did the two happen to be staying in the same digs? Why on earth did the director, Arthur Dreifuss, deem it necessary to add this spurious vulgar romance to Behan's play—indeed to make it the centre-piece at the expense of most of the play's original strength and vitality? Worse again, why did Brendan Behan allow the charges to be made and then allow the piece to be advertised as "Brendan Behan's 'The Quare Fellow'?"

But these questions come too late. The film is made and we are left with a pale shadow of language, unimaginatively photographed, devoid of action and—except in the handling of the hanging itself—almost without drama. The acting, admittedly, is good—particularly from Walter Macken—but the talents seem wasted and are not helped by an indifferent sound track.

There is a... ..

The Irish Independent  
1 October 1962 (extract)

building up among the prisoners and warders as the day of execution draws near. The provision of a love affair between the wife and one of the warders is not at all successful. Where the new character succeeds however, is in making us realise that the execution of a man is a terrible and heart-breaking affliction to his friends. The synchronisation of the reading moan from the wife with moment of execution is tremendously effective.

Patrick McGoohan does very well as the novice warder from the islands who arrives at the prison with set ideas about crime and punishment. Under the guidance of Walter Macken (an accomplished piece of acting) he comes to learn that while society may accept capital punishment, it is not so easy for the individual when he has to stand beside the condemned man on the gallows and to hold up his head so that everything may be completed in its proper fashion. Pilib O Floinn, as the Governor, preserves a nice balance between discipline and justice, anxious that nobody should be punished in the wrong and determined at the same time that his superiors shall have no cause for censure.

The actual hanging which is shown to some extent on the screen I did not find as upsetting as some other people. Rather, I thought it was the final frightening plea for the abolition of capital punishment. What followed was an anti-climax and the scene of the wife walking slowly across the roadway in her loneliness was unnecessary.

Despite its flaws, "The Quare Fellow" is a sincere piece of work, thoughtful, and at times, very moving. I recommend it highly.

The Evening Press on the 29 September said

"They've taken the Behan out of it and I don't like the result at all." Finally remarking: "No. under-eighteens, you're not missing anything this time. *The Quare Fella* is mainly for export."

The Sunday Independent reviewer, on the 30 September, was equally dismissive wondering "... how it ever got into a film festival" and remarking "... and only Walter Macken as the warder who loathes hangings (a deeply felt performance), and Dermot Kelly (as the warder who loathes Macken) redeem the picture".



MAITLAND  
REPERTORY SOCIETY

presents

The First Performance on an  
Australian Stage

of

HOME IS THE HERO

By Walter Macken

Sponsored by the Arts Council of Australia, N.S.W.

Division, Maitland Branch

Maitland Town Hall,

WEDNESDAY, 1st AUGUST,

1956

## Appendix 4.22

Front cover from the Hamburger Kammerspiele programme for *Home is the Hero*,  
titled in German *Fünf Jahr Danach* (*Five Years After*)





Premiere in den Kammerspielen:

## „Fünf Jahre danach...“

Die Kammerspiele präsentierten gestern Abend einen neuen Autor, den 40jährigen Iren Walter Macken, und sein gut gemachtes Stück: „Fünf Jahre danach...“ (Heimkehr des Helden). Macken, Regisseur und Schauspieler, kennt das Theater genau. Man merkt es dem Bühnenwirksamen Dreifachstar und den zehn erglebigen Rollen an, Ida Ehres Inszenierung fand lebhaften Premierenbeifall.

Der heimkehrrende „Held“ des (bei uns gegen „Fünf Jahre danach...“ umgetauschten) Originaltitels ist der wegen Totschlags zu Gefängnishaft verurteilte Transportarbeiter Paddo O'Reilly. Ein Schrank von Kerl, gutmütig im Grunde, unberechenbar, wenn er einen über den Durst getrunken, Haustyrann auch, dessen Stimmungen sich die Szenen anpassen müssen.



VATER UND TOCHTER: MARK-GZIMEG UND JULIA FJORSEN.

Nun kommt er zurück... und die Zeit ist nicht stehen geblieben. Zu Hause war man recht glücklich ohne ihn. Sohn Willie, fleißiger Schuhmacher, wurde der Ernährer, Mutter fand Geschmack an den Trübsungen des Alkohols, Tochter Josie ging ihren eigenen Weg. Heimkehrer Paddo stößt alle vor den Kopf. Die Freunde, die sich freuten, ihn herzlich zu begrüßen, die Angehörigen, die sich ihren Frieden nicht stören lassen wollen. Es geht hart auf hart. Fast wäre der Riese nochmals ins Unglück gerannt — als er sich entschließt, vorerst wotter-zuwandern.

Die in der Wohnküche der O'Reillys spielenden drei Akte leben ganz aus dem besonderen Milieu, das — vermutlich — ursprünglich betont frischen Kolorit hat. Ida Ehres Inszenierung hat eine präzise Anordnung der Story vermieden. Stereonbanner-Papierföhnen stecken irgendwo; sonst gibt es für eine Verlegung nach den USA kaum einen Anhalt. Die Aufführung mit ihrem insgesamt gut gewählten Ensemble hat alle Voraussetzungen für hohe Qualität, ist aber offenbar ein wenig voreilig entlassen worden. Die Inszenierung und Abstimmen wird

sich vor allem bei Josie und dem Ehepaar Dovothil lohnen.) Jede einzelne Figur ist im Grunde so richtig angelegt. Jede hat so starke Momente, daß ein gütlicherer Effekt erzielt werden mußte.

Georg Mark-Gzimeg als der Bär Paddo, Ellen Waldeck als seine Frau, Peine und Eva Flebig, die Untermieter, Neugass und Mita von Ahlefeld in ihren liebevoll ausgemalten Episoden bürgen dafür. Nicht minder die Jungen: der begabte Günter Hölzlmann und die (zu Recht mit erstem Szenenbeifall ausgezeichnete) frisch-anmutige Irene Nathusius; ebenso das zweite Paar, Julia Fjorsen und der sicher skizzierte Manchester von Werner Schumacher.

Das Publikum, gepackt von Mackens kräftigem Theater, gab allen, Ida Ehre und Bühnenbildner Hoffmann starken Beifall.

HA

## Appendix 4.24

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### Bühne und Studio in Konkurrenz

Innerhalb weniger Tage ergab sich die Gelegenheit, ein für Deutschland neues dramatisches Werk in zwei Darstellungsformen zu sehen: auf dem Theater und auf dem Fernsehschirm. Es war der dichterisch starke realistische Dreiakter - "Home is a hero" des Iren Walter Macken. Ida Ehre inszenierte an ihren Hamburger Kammerspielen die deutsche Bühnen-Erstaufführung unter dem Titel „Fünf Jahre danach“, und wenig später zeigte im Fernsehen des NWDR der Bearbeiter und Regisseur Leo Mittler dasselbe Stück unter der (der Ironie des Originals näherkommenden) Spitzmarke „Heimkehr des Helden“. Die nicht zufällige Duplizität der Ereignisse zeigte, welche Möglichkeiten das Fernsehstudio der Bühne schon heute voraus hat und worin es — vielleicht für immer — hinter dem Theater zurückstehen muß.

Mackens Schauspiel ist ein dichtes, kräftiges, balladeskes Werk, das auf scharfer Beobachtung irischer Kleinbürger beruht, aber nicht bei naturalistischer Detailmalerei stehenbleibt, sondern aus einer tragisch verlaufenden Familienepisode das Gleichnis von der Hinfälligkeit teurer Absichten zu entwickeln weiß. Ein bärenstarker, zwischen Sündenbewußtsein und Selbstgerechtigkeit hin und her getriebener Hausvater hat fünf Jahre zuvor in alkoholisiertem Zorn einen braven und ruhigen Zechkumpan mit einem Schlag erschossen. Nun kehrt er aus dem Gefängnis zurück. Die Nachbarschaft bereitet einen turbulenten Empfang vor, während die eigene Familie das Ende einer dürftigen und traurigen, aber immerhin friedlichen Periode ihres Lebens beklagt und ihn mit gemischten Gefühlen bewillkommenet. Sofort bricht sein Groll los. Er ist bußfertig bis zur Askese, aber er will den im Gefängnis gefaßten Vorsatz

zum Puritanismus auch den Seinen aufzwingen. Sie nun wären bereit, ihm seine Sünde nicht länger nachzutragen; daß er sie aber zur Heiligkeit nötigen will, finden sie widerwärtig. Sohn, Tochter und Freund rebellieren gegen die Anmaßung des nun Überfrommen. Um ein Haar kommt es zu einem zweiten Totschlag. Der „Held“ straft daraufhin sich selbst und erlegt sich die Buße der Heimatlosigkeit auf. Die Familie kann, beruhigt {calm}, weiter an ihren Lebenshoffnungen spinnen.

Es ist ein kondensiertes Spiel, das sich nur auf Augenblicke in Heftigkeit entlädt. Für die Gewohnheiten des heutigen Theaters ist es eher ein wenig zu still. Darum wohl ließ Ida Ehre die Heftigkeiten dröhnend hervorstechen und alle Darsteller sich wie in ständiger Ekstase bewegen — was zwar einer Vorstellung von irischem Temperament entsprechen mag, aber nicht unbedingt den Intentionen, die der Dichter in diesem Falle hatte. Trotzdem: die Aufführung, in sich klug disponiert, war wirkungsvoll.

Mochte es nun der balladeske Grundzug des Stückes sein oder der Anreiz zu fernerer Intimität, den das Arbeiten im Fernsehstudio nun einmal mit sich bringt — jedenfalls, die Fernsehaufführung geriet um vieles zarter, poetischer und auch geistig bedeutsamer als die im Theater. Die Kamera kann den Zuschauer eben in eine viel vertraulichere Nähe zu den Gestalten rücken, sie kann die Physiognomien der Darsteller in „Großaufnahmen“ abschreiten. Im Studio ist blitzschneller Wechsel der Szenerie möglich, weil man mehrere Kameras einsetzen kann. Und dieser größere Reichtum an Kunstmittel kann in der Hand eines sensitiven Regisseurs wie Leo Mittler die unleugbaren Nachteile des Fernsehspiels aufwiegen: den Verzicht auf die Farbe und auf die Plastizität. Und ihre Publizität ist doch recht viel größer als selbst die eines Serienerfolges auf der Bühne.

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## THEATER

KLEINBURGER

### Trauerspiel in der Wohnküche

Die deutschen Fernseh-Teilnehmer konnten sich am letzten Freitagabend ein Einfamilienspiel anschauen, das erst neun Tage zuvor in Ida Ehres Hamburger Kammerspielen zum erstenmal über eine deutsche Bühne gegangen war. Damit wurde das Schauspiel „Heimkehr des Helden“ des irischen Schauspielers-Dramatikers



„Heimkehr des Helden“ von Walter Macken

Walter Macken gleich in zwei verschiedenen Fassungen dem deutschen Spielplan einverleibt. Am Broadway läuft das Stück schon in der zweiten Saison.

Mackens Handlung ist scheinbar so einfach wie eine Kurzgeschichte ohne Moral. Paddo O'Reilly aus Galway in Irland hat vor fünf Jahren im Trunk und aus Versehen seinen Kumpan Pat Green erschossen. Jetzt kehrt er aus dem Gefängnis zurück. Mit irisch-saftigem Überschwang bereiten seine Freunde eine stürmisch-herzliche Begrüßung vor. Nur in Paddos

• In der Aufführung der Hamburger Kammerspiele: Werner Schumacher als Macken, Georg Mark-Czimeg als Paddo (r.).

eigener Familie machen sich gemischte Gefühle breit.

Paddo kommt an. Er weicht dem lärmenden Freundes-Empfang aus und steht plötzlich in der Stube: ein mächtiger, ansterer, graugesichtiger Kerl. Mit dieser Ankunft beginnt seine Ein-Mann-Tragödie, das „kleinbürgerliche Trauerspiel“, wie „Die Welt“ es nannte. Ohne Absicht, aber auch ohne Mühe bringt der heimgekehrte Held alles durcheinander. Er ist ein Vulkan, der nur noch Asche spielen kann.

Macken stellt diesen Zerstörungsprozeß so dar, daß keiner der Beteiligten völlig recht behält. Gattin Daylia ist liebenswert und lebensfroh, aber sie braucht eine starke Hand. Paddo allerdings, Diktator aus animalischer Veranlagung, verkehrt ihre läßlichen Sünden in todeswürdige Verbrechen. Tochter Josie ist leichtfertig, aber im Grunde brav. Paddo behandelt sie verächtlich, wie eine Hure.

Sohn Willie hat bei aller äußeren Ruhe das gefährliche Temperament des Vaters geerbt. Im Unterbewußtsein wird er Vater Paddo nie verzeihen, daß er ihn als Baby im Spiel fallen ließ; ein verkrüppelter Fuß blieb als Folge zurück. Die Untermieter-Familie Dovetail geht bei aller Harmlosigkeit dem müden heimgekehrten Mann begreiflicherweise auf die Nerven.

Paddos Tragik liegt darin, daß er aus jeder Kleinigkeit ein Grundsatzproblem macht. Als er zurückkam, lebte seine Familie in Freiheit. Jetzt will er sie unterwerfen, doch er weiß selbst nicht, welche Knute er schwingt. „Willie“, sagt er zu seinem Sohn, „was ist denn nur los? Willie, was möchtest du denn, das ich tun soll?“ — „Ich weiß nicht“, antwortet Willie. „Laß uns einfach in Ruhe.“

Mit so einfachen Formeln treibt Macken seine Tragödie immer weiter voran. Seine saftigen und auch ohne bestimmten Zweck lebensfähigen Figuren handeln die Frage der Freiheit des kleinen Mannes ab. Diese Freiheit entsteht schon dadurch, daß jeder-mann in Ruhe gelassen und von niemandem am Gängelband gezerrt wird. Durch die farbigen Kulissen eines bewegten Familienlebens schimmert urplötzlich das politische Grundprogramm aller irischen Kämpfe um Selbständigkeit.

Diese Absicht klingt nur sehr diskret an. Mackens dramatisches Temperament überdeckt sie immer wieder so stark mit ursprünglichem Leben, daß das Schauspiel gut ohne sie auskommen kann. Von dieser Erkenntnis ließ sich Regisseurin Ida Ehre leiten, die das Stück für ihr Theater in „Fünf Jahre danach...“ umtaufte. Sie inszenierte Paddo O'Reillys traurige Geschichte als geräuschvoll-bunte Familienkatastrophe.

Das Hamburger Fernsehen war von vornherein gezwungen, den ausladenden Text auf siebzig Sendeminuten zu kürzen. Für diese Aufgabe und für die Regie hatte sich Intendant Pleister den Regisseur Leo Mittler verschrieben, der 1951 aus der amerikanischen Emigration zurückkehrte und seither an allen großen bundesdeutschen Bühnen inszeniert.

Mittler, ein Mann mit Fernseh-Erfahrung von Amerika her, gab sich Mühe, aus der Kürzungsnot eine Tugend zu machen. Das Stück spielt in einer einzigen Dekoration, der O'Reillyschen Wohnküche. Aus begründeter Scheu vor photographiertem Theater ließ Mittler im Fernseh-Studio außer der Wohnküche auch einen Hof, ein Gärtchen, ein Schlafzimmer und eine Kneipe aufbauen. Aus dem Mackenschen Text griff er sich die Absätze heraus, wie er sie gerade benötigte, und schrieb ein neues Manuskript mit ständig wechselnden Szenen.

So können die Liebespaare des Stücks ihre Privatgespräche in angemessener Inti-

mer Umgebung führen. Sohn Willie findet endlich zu seiner jahrelang scheu verehrten Lilly Green, der Tochter des von Paddo Erschlagenen. Josie verwandelt in der Gartenlaube ihren Freund Manchester aus einem Filou in einen arbeitswilligen Ehrenmann. Paddo stößt mit seinen ehemaligen Kumpanen am Kneipenfenster zusammen. Den versuchten Totschlag am geschwätzigsten Dovetail belästigt allerdings auch Mittler in der Wohnküche.

Diese Tat bringt Paddos Maß zum Überlaufen. Dovetail hat Paddo seine Verachtung ins Gesicht gesagt. Paddo schlägt ihn nieder. Dovetail erholt sich wieder, aber in der Zwischenzeit erkennt Paddo am haßgeschwätigsten Zurückweichen der Familie, daß er innerhalb seines Hauses überflüssig geworden ist. Er geht fort, niemand

weiß wohin, er überläßt seine Familie dem kleinen Glück, das er nicht begreift.

Macken spart sich ein Happy-End. Er ist grausam genug, die nicht böse gemeinte Grausamkeit der menschlichen Natur kommentarlos darzustellen. Denn niemand weint Paddo nach, obwohl auch er es nicht böse gemeint hat. Seine alten Kumpanen brennen nun zu seinem Auszug das Freudenfeuer ab, das sie zu seinem Einzug hatten anzünden wollen.

Allerdings läßt sich Mittler auf dem Fernsehschirm einen sentimentalischen Schlußeffekt nicht entgehen. Während die Liebespaare glücklich flüstern und die Kinder am Feuer singen, zeigt er Paddos Gestalt, wie sie langsam im Dunkel verschwindet. Aber das ist nur folgerichtig nach einem Stück voll gebrochener Charaktere von ungebrochener Vitalität.

## Appendix 4.25

Copied here are another photograph, copy of the cast from the play programme and one press cutting from the Norwegian production of *Heimkommen helt* (*Home is the Hero*) in 1956. These were made available from the Archive, Det Norske Teatret.



This is the scene where Willie defends Josie from Paddo. 'Go on, Willie, give it to him. Dig it to the maker's name in him!' (Page 77, 1953 script)

### *Heimkommen helt*

(*Home is the hero*)

*Skodespel i 3 akter av Walter Mucken*

*Til norsk av Arthur Klæbo*

*Regi: Dagmar Myhrvold*

*Dekorasjon: Snorre Tindberg*

*Dei som er med:*

Paddo O'Reilly .....	Lars Tvinde
Daylia, kona hans .....	Lydia Opøien
Willie, son hans .....	Finn Kvalem
Josie, dotter hans .....	Astrid Folstad
Dovetail, leigebuar .....	Eduard Drablos
Bið, kona hans .....	Siri Rom
Mrs. Green .....	Åsta Voss
Lily Green, dotter hennar .....	Henny Moan
Trapper O'Flynn .....	Nils Hald
Manchester Monaghan .....	Lasse Kolstad

Scene: Eit bus i Galway.

Pause etter 2. akt.

Sources: Department of Theatre History at the National Library in Oslo



DET NORSKE TEATRET

WALTER MACKEN

## „Heimkommen helt“

«Frodig irsk dramatik».

Carl Fredrik Engelstad.

«Prektig irsk komedie — Her er noe for enhver smak unntagen den dårlige — Trofast gammelorskjærlighet, frodig humor, dobbeltforelskelse med to forlovelser —».

Paul Gjesdahl.

«Det er en lang rekke særdeles fornøyelige, særpregede, rørende og komiske skikkelser som i tur og orden dukker frem og skaper en egenartet blanding av lystig humor og besk alvor i opptrinnene».

Aud Thagaard.

«Rett som det er set vi med latten og gråten i halsen samstundes —».

Jo Ørjasæter.

**Lars Tvinde:** «Behersker scenen. — Veldig kraft i skildringen. — Ruvende og fengslende».

**Lydia Opøien:** «Noe av det fineste jeg kan huske jeg har sett på noen norsk scene på år og dag».

**Lasse Kolstad:** «Kraftfull — Temperamentsfull — Virkningsfull — Kjekk og sympatisk».

**Asta Voss:** «Fin studie — Tragisk inderlighet — skremt og forsiktig og sårbar».

**Astrid Folstad:** Prestasjonen glitrer av talent —».

**Arthur Klæbo:** «Briljant oversettelse — Frodig replikk».

**Snorre Tindberg:** «Artistisk — Fantasifull — Hjemmekoselig interiør».

**Edvard Drabløs:** «En herlig skikkelse — En av hans aller fornøyeligste og mest fantasifulle — En stor aften har Edvard Drabløs».

**Nils Hald:** «Rørende menneskelighet og fint behersket komikk — skyt midt i blink».

**Siri Røm:** «Friskt portrett — Pågående og robust skildring — Snild og voldsom både i kjærighet og hat».

**Finn Kvaalem:** I høy klasse. «Dempet inderlighet — fin og sjelfull skildring».

**Henny Moan:** «Ren og klokkeklar — Deilig — Uimotstæelig».

**Dagmar Myhrvold:** «Presis og klok regi — Et mesterstykke av regikunst».



## Appendix 4.26

Synopses of newspapers reports on *Heimkommen helt* (*Home is the Hero*) performance in Norway in November 1956. This translation was provided to Walter Macken and can be found in BUW Folder 62.

### Norges Handels og Sjøfartstidende 8/11 1956

... None of our other theatres could have performed the Irish dramatist Walter Macken's play with such genuine spirit and artistic sense, or put into action more luxuriant episodes, both tragic and comical, than Let Norske Teatret last night. It was an altogether fascinating and partly profoundly moving performance...

H.L.

### Morgenbladet 8/11 1956

...Walter Macken, the author, has succeeded in forming the after all very tragic theme in such a way that the gloominess of it is outweighed by an almost unbridled comic art both as to characters and situations. A long series of episodes are set up with an outstanding burlesque humour, which is completely relieving. ... This performance is really a refreshing contribution to the until now in many ways weary theatre season.

Carl Fredrik Engelstad

### Arbeiderbladet 9/11 1956

... What a pleasure isn't it to see an altogether new creation performed on a stage, not only a very talented variation of people we have met before in many different plays and situations. Those, who saw Hamlet for the first time - or Hjalmar Ekdal - were they aware of that this was a course that never had been on the menu before?

In the play HEIMKOMEN HELT by Walter Macken we meet for the first time with the crushed sadist ... One should think that a theme of such grislyness should get a similar deck out, but in that case we don't know Irish dramatists. They are capable of bringing kindness into the worst of hells, and Walter Macken has painted the gruesome 24 hours, during which the tearful crocodile is home for a visit, with such iridescence of all the finest colours, that the on-looker is greatly satisfied. Here is something for everybody's taste, except the bad one - true grandmother-affection, exuberant humour, double-infatuation with two engagements before the curtain goes down, a pathetic death-scene and lamentations about a man, who, when it comes to the sticking-point, only is quite simply a not murdered car-owner.

But during all this the shadow of probability does not move away, and that's what is so marvellous. And no happy end for the scoundrel, no psychological falsifications are making us forget the deadly danger a penitent and self-pitying tormenter of wife and children like Paddo



O'Reilly would have been for the little village.... Det Norske Teatret has its own way of handling plays like "Heimkommen helt". ... In producing "Heimkommen helt" Dagmar Myhrvold has delivered a little masterpiece of stage-management. ... It turned out to be a great success.

Paul Gjesdahl

Nationen 8/11 1956

... "Heimkommen helt" by Walter Macken has been an enjoyable performance, one of the very best we have seen this season in Oslo. ... The public at the opening last night demonstrated unmistakably that it was a success....

Jo Ørjasæter

Friheten 8/11 1956

... The message of this play is to a great extent drowned in the splendid Irish mixture of remarkable humour and tearfulness, skilfully presented by the author. It is a most amusing play. ... This is a production which will be a source of great delight to both theatre and public....

I.D.

## Appendix 4.27



Carl Ström som Paddo.

Riksteatern hade på tisdagskvällen turnéspel i Borlänge på den irländske författaren Walter Mackens skådespel "Hjälten kommer hem", som nu för första gången ges i Sverige. Stycket hade sin uppmärksammade urpremiär i juli 1952 på Abbey Theatre i Dublin.

Carl Ström spelar den manliga huvudrollen, "hjälten" Paddo O'Reilly, i Riksteaterns föreställning och i övriga uppgifter märks Einar Axelsson, Stina Ståhle, Manne Grünberger, Sven-Erik Perzon, Rut Cronström, Gerda Landgren, Solveig Dahl, Ilse-Nore Tromm och Keve Hjelm. Sandro Malmquist har svarat för regi och dekor.



RIKSTEATERN hade på tisdagskvällen turnépremiär i Borlänge på den irländske författaren Walter Mackens skådespel "Hjälten kommer hem", som nu för första gången gavs i Sverige. Stycket hade sin uppmärksammade urpremiär i juli 1952 på Abbey Theatre i Dublin.

Carl Ström spelar den manliga huvudrollen: "hjälten" Paddo O'Reilly, i Riksteaterns föreställning här är han tillsammans med Stina Ståhle.

### *Ny irländsk pjäs på Riksteatern*

*Sp. D. 24. 2. 54.*

Riksteatern hade på tisdagskvällen turnépremiär i Borlänge på den irländske författaren Walter Mackens skådespel "Hjälten kommer hem", som därmed för första gången gavs i Sverige. Stycket hade sin urpremiär i juli 1952 på Abbey Theatre i Dublin. Carl Ström spelar den manliga huvudrollen och i övriga uppgifter märks Einar Axelsson, Stina Ståhle, Manne Grünberger, Sven-Erik Perzon, Rut Cronström, Gerda Landgren, Solveig Dahl, Ilse-Nore Tromm och Keve Hjelm. Sandro Malmquist har svarat för regi och dekor.

## Appendix 4.28

Report from the *Uppsala Bild* dated 20 April 1954

### *En hjälte kommer hem*

UPPSALA 19 april. — På Uppsala stadsteater är det tält mellan givarna och Irländarna. Bara en vecka efter Samuel Becketts pjäs "Vi väntar på Godot" är man färdig med Walter Mackens "En hjälte kommer hem" (Home is the Hero), som hade premiär annandagen i teaterchefen Gösta Folkes regi.

Macken är född 1915 i hamnstaden Galway på atlantkusten, varifrån han hämtat miljö till de flesta av sina dramer och berättelser och där han också verkat som ledare för en liten gaelisk teater. Ingen misstär sig på att innehållet är originaltappning.

Hjälten i skådespelet är liksom sin motsvarighet i Synges "Hjälten på den gröna ön" en dräpare och skrävlare. Situationen vid hans återkomst efter avtjänat fängelsestraff är också likartad. De irländska diktarna sysslar gärna med den sortens figurer. De hårdföra och vildsinta lagöverträdarna omges med en frihetsnimbus, som sätter fantasin i rörelse och väcker det jättrörda folkets beundran.

För 28 år sedan spelade Carl Ström Synges hjälte. När man nu såg honom komma in som den medelålders cellmärkte Paddy O'Reilly verkade han bekant. Bara så mycket fastare, mäktigare och auktoritativ. Med denna egensinniga och tyranniska kraftkarl har Carl Ström lagt en ny stor karaktärsstudie till sin förut högst imponerande rollserie på uppsala-scenen.

Paddy O'Reilly har ingenting lärt och ingenting glömt under fängelseåren. Han tror, att allt skall vara sig likt i hemmet och att han själv skall kunna föra samma hårda enväldsregemente i familjekretsen som förut. Hustrun, som gått och blivit lätt alkoholiserad i ensamheten, rår han på, men barnen trotsar honom. Det blir en dramatisk kraftmätning i andra och tredje akten, som så när slutar med ett nytt drap, innan

han tvingas resignera. Stycket slutar med att hjälten försvinner genom den dörr han kom och går bort som en ensam man. Ett par kommenterande scener efter hans sorti är oväsentliga och horde han strukits.

Vid sidan av Carl Ström gjorde Bengt Brunskog en utmärkt insats som sonen vid skomakarbänken. Denna prestation av ung och trotsigt allvar övertygade om nya betydande resurser hos skådespelaren. Brunskog har utvecklats mycket under det sista spelåret. Fylgia Zadig som dottern gav med sitt röda hår och oro i kroppen en god bild av en flicka på glid och hos Dagny Linds porterdoflande hustru fanns en viss resning mitt i förfallet.

Men annars låg styrkan avgjort på herrsidan. Gunnar Strååt framställde en färgatark fyllbult med spelmanshumör, som man hade nöje av mellan urladdningarna och Gunnar Öhlund en stillsam och trogen vän i huset, som tedde sig smått rörande, där han satt med sitt damspel i spiselvrån. En något tvekydig fästman med knogjärn i kavajen spelades av Lennart Lindberg. I övriga roller uppträdde Marianne Karibeck, Kerstin Berger och Vanja Rodefeldt.

Gösta Folkes instruktion och grepp om föreställningen verkade fast och tveklöst och Härje Ekman's köksinteriör gav intryck av att vara autentisk. Däremot fanns det några distraktioner i översättningen. Inte tänder man väl välkomstbål och snapsar gamla bilar på Irland med paraffinolja?

Martin Strömberg.



## Appendix 4.29

Press cuttings for the Riksteatern production of *Twilight of a Warrior* (*Du stolte krigare*) from *Svenska Dagbladet*, *Dagens Nyheter*, *Stockholms-Tidningen* and *Expressen* all dated 21 February 1958

### Riksteaterpremiär med irländare

ESKILSTUNA. (SvD:s utgående medarbetare.) Hjältar — uttrycket taget i den gamla heroiska bemärkelsen — är sällsynta företeelser i vår tid. Den moderna psykologien har avlivat dem och de lär numera endast förekomma i Sovjetunionen, som ju har sin egen psykologi. Vill man umgås med hjältar, får man gå till sin bokhylla — eller resa till Irland, för se, borta på den gröna ön vid Atlanten vandrar hjältar fortfarande omkring livs levande och ömt vårdande minnen från dagen — för inte så länge sedan — då irländarna uppsade Buckingham Palace tro och loven och skapade sig ett eget land.

Men inte heller på Irland är man helt övertygad om att hjältar är så alltigenom förträffliga personer. Om man skrapar på dem, visar de sig kanske vara tyranner, frihetsskämpar, som överlevt sig själva och svikit sin ungdoms ideal.

Det är i varje fall vad den irländske dramatikern Walter Macken har funnit, och sina reaktioner inför den uppmärksammade han fram i ett skådespel med titeln "Du stolte krigare", som Riksteatern på torsdagen visade för första gången i Sverige vid en premiär i Eskilstuna.

Det är ett porträtt av en hjälte på äldre dagar, som Walter Macken presenterar. Dacey Adam, så heter styckets huvudperson, var en gång med om att befria sitt land. Han blev hjälte, men när freden kom, kunde han inte glömma sin roll. Han får spela rollen länge. Ända tills hans dotter slutligen gör uppror och inför en fästman i fadershuset.

Det är genom denna konflikt, som

#### Du stolte krigare av WALTER MACKEN

Översättning: Lars Hansson. Regi: Sandro Malmquist. I rollerna: Nils Fritz, Mimi Nelson, Berit Lindjö, Jan von Zweigbergk, Mona Geijer-Falkner, Georg Skarstedt, George Fant, Jari Hamilton och Eric Breile.

handlingen rullas upp. Macken har skrivit ett handfast och rejält stycke med levande figurer. I centrum står Adam som ett obetydligt halvverk. I bättre händer än i Nils Fritz' kunde Riksteatern knappast ha placerat rollen. Fritz gjorde den robusta typen verklig, ställde fram honom som en kraftkarl, som inte en sekund tvekade om att han hade rätt. Den blivande svärsonen, som tar upp striden med familjetyrannen, framställdes av George Fant, och dottern spelades av Berit Lindjö. Mimi Nelson gjorde hans granna hustru, som för länge sedan fått nog av hjälte-dramaterna, och Georg Skarstedt ritade ett helt övertygande porträtt av Adams alkoholiserade och kuschade broder.

Macken har tidigare presenterats av Riksteatern, Uppsala Stadsteater och Radioteatern med andra stycken. Han hör till de mångsidigt begåvade genom att framträda både som författare, skådespelare och regissör. Någon nydanare är han alls inte. Han bygger på gamla goda irländska traditioner, men kan hans stycken locka till närmare bekantskap med föregångarna, så är det ingen överloppsgärning, att han apelas i Sverige.

Felix

Irvin ett melodramatiskt inslag — till en tämligen beskedlig sångskomedi om en ung man på glänsfärd som måste stå på sig gentemot en dommande, men i grund och botten öm fader för att få den han ville ha.

Nyckelrollen är övermanniska-fadern, hustrurannen som befäller alla att dansa efter sin pipa, och som "inte kan ta ett nederlag" antingen han önskar utkräva hämnd eller spela försyn för sina närmaste. Nils Fritz räckte honom endast till knäna, man kunde inte begripa varför hans dotter eller någon annan skulle dansa i knäveckan inför honom. Ändå mindre hur han blivit en ryktbar frihetsskämp. George Fant var den som redde sig bäst, även om hans tolkning i stort sett stannade vid friarens redbarhet och präktighet. De övriga i ensemblen skall man nog inte gå in på. En fråga bara — borde inte ungdomarna ta verkliga krafttag för att förbättra sin diktion?

Berit Höhnel



George Fant och Nils Fritz i Riksteaterns föreställning i Eskilstuna av "Du stolte krigare".

### Du stolte krigare

ESKILSTUNA (ST). Den irländske dramatikern, teaterledaren, skådespelaren och romanförfattaren Walter Macken är inte okänd för den svenska teaterpubliken. Han är tidigare representerad såväl i Radioteatern som i Riksteatern. Det var alltså inte företagingsnyfikenhet som gjorde att hans skådespel "Du stolte krigare" mötte ett ovanligt stort intresse vid Riksteaterns premiär i Eskilstuna på torsdagskvällen. Snarare var det väl konstellationen Nils Fritz och George Fant.

Stycket blev ingen odelad framgång. Visserligen övermålade Fant med en mjukhet och en värme som man inte trodde denna dynamiske skådespelare maktigt, men det räckte inte för att ro hem hela föreställningen. Regin visar åtskilliga blottor. Inte minst i den överspelade första akten. Även andra akten dras med blister, framför allt i avslutningen, som blir segdragen på gränsen till tråkighet.

Nils Fritz gestaltar den långt ifrån lilla rollen av irländske frihetsskämpen Dacey Adam som förvandlat idealen till makt, känsla och ständigt måste fortsätta att slåss — och segra. Han börjar grandloft men avslutar se-

### "Du stolte krigare"

Felix DN:s utgående medarbetare

ESKILSTUNA, torsdag

Om man skall döma efter de pjäser som irländaren Walter Macken, som hitills tagits upp i landet, byser han ett speciellt intresse för hjältar — de må ha vunnit sina sporrar i ett upprödraslag eller i blodig frihetsskamp. Deras kännetecken är att de till varje pris måste driva sin vilja igenom. Tidigare har visats "En hjälte kommer hem" och på torsdagen hade Riksteatern premiär i Eskilstuna på "Du stolte krigare" som gavs i Sandro Malmquistas regi.

Det är nästan ogörligt att grunda ett omdöme om pjäsen enbart på premiärföreställningen. Skådespelarna var nämligen inte alla vuxna sina roller. Det som skulle klingat stolt och ståtligt blev ihåligt, det som skulle varit halv men lika känd lyrik blev uteslutande banalt, det dramatiska blev teatraliskt. Att stycket är behäftat med ofullkomligheter torde vara säkert, där finns gott om schabloner, och då och då tänket man att psykologin inte skulle vanpröja en misroman. Men spelad på ett riktigt sätt måste pjäsen ha en sorts yvig charm. Nu brast det i fråga om fantasi hos aktörerna. De levde sig inte in i situationerna och de identifierade sig aldrig med de personer som de skulle ge kött och blod. Det hela blev inte en drag-



Nils Fritz och George Fant i Walter Mackens pjäs, som hade premiär torsdag kväll i Eskilstuna.

kamp mellan sturiga, temperamentsfulla människor, som alla strötade åt var sitt håll, det blev — bortsett

**Chapter 5: The Abbey Board Member,  
Assistant Manager and Artistic Advisor**

**Appendices 5.1-5.14**



### Walter Macken to return to Abbey Theatre as a director

The lively column that fills in the background to Ireland's news

## Parade

PROFOUND  
INTEREST  
IN THE  
NATIONAL  
THEATRE

Mr. Madsen joined the theatre in the late '30s and his first role was as a walk-on part in a play which he cannot now remember, but he established himself as an actor of very great talent with his intercalated portrayal of Hamlet based on M. Moller's "The Rime of a Viking Men." This is a performance which is still talked about; it ranks among the greatest of the past two decades.

His winsy "Muller's Man-  
ner," "There Is the Heart"  
"Twilight of a Warrior" and  
"Looking In the Looking  
Glass" were given Abbey  
premieres, but more recently  
he wrote "The Voice of  
Blood" specially for Gill  
Stark. This was presented at  
a Theatre Festival a few years

Mr. Marken tells me he has another play now completed with still Church especially in mind. It is set in the West of Ireland, is called "The Last Gentleman," and is a straight

These dealings with the end of  
play was in the country's exor-  
tion. It will be presented by a  
British Theatre as soon as Mr.  
Carpenter's other commitments  
leave him free, and the author  
will direct and star also some  
a play.

He has also finished another book due to be published in September, titled "Land of the Yellow Ash," he says it is about children and is for children in the age of 10.

Mr. Mackay and his wife will leave their beautiful, remodeled, lighted home when they have completed a new house at Melbo. With its space six acres and lovely gardens within sight of the coast, it is they feel too large for them now that they are alone.

About the Midway, Mr. Macken prefers not to speak except to say that he foresees for it an eventual most ~~very~~ future. In any case this is what he will work towards with all his dogged but gentle dedication.

Although his senses are still widely ailing, I expect secretly a handful of people would recognize the name of Thomas Patrick Keenan. But this lack is likely to disappear soon. I learn a nephew, Peter A. Keenan, of Annadale-on-Hudson, Minn., Dublin, is writing the life story of the grandfather, who was born just 100 years ago.

A native Dubliner, Thomas Patrick Keenan—He was professionally known as "Tommy Keenan" composed such lasting favorites as "The Rose of Ardara," "A Mother's Love Is a Blessing," "Rose of Killarney," "I'll Remember You Love in My Prayers," "Let Mr. Alibi Be Down," "If You're



Irish Come Into the Parlor,  
"The Hays from the County  
Antrim," "Hello, Hello, Pagan,"  
and a host of others.

Educated at St. Mary's  
 C.W.B. he was a brother of  
 this house he became a full  
 time policeman, touring  
 throughout Ireland and Britain  
 and seeing nothing but his  
 own countrymen. It was only  
 after his death at Castleknock  
 Lodge, Co. Dub., where he was  
 buried, that his number  
 appeared in print, for he re-  
 fused permission to have about  
 himself during his lifetime.

Four years after he married Keenan, who died and the tragedy was followed shortly afterwards by the death of his son, Percy Keenan himself, a house-writer, has collected plenty of interesting material for a biography of the style.

A number of week-end events which I have been asked to mention include a most attractive Fete under the auspices of the St. John of God Brothers at St. Raphael's, Cambridge, on Saturday and Sunday. For

הנהגתו היתה כדלהלן: הוא היה  
מורה על כל דבר שיש בו חשש  
לכבודו או לנפשו או לממונו  
ולא היה מורה על דבר אחר.

[illegible]

More on the future to be  
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the back of the party. It is  
convenient for a week with one  
unpleasant type of atmosphere

1941

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## Tribute to devoted

That smiling, happy man in the picture is Mother married Mikee, C.F. who smiled recently after being 48 years attached to St. Joseph's School, Wardsboro, Vermont. 19 of them as head-mistress.

During all that time she was absent from duty only for two weeks when she underwent an operation, and at a presentation ceremony, which was attended by her brother, Very Rev. Canon McKee, P.P., Ardara, Co. Mayo, tributes to her service were made and allowing a casket of sympathy to the Austin Mother Society's activities were sent to her home by public loan to place in her room and placed, grateful people, parents and friends have time presented her with a trip to Rome and the Holy Land.



## Appendix 5.2

Certificate for Walter Macken's 200 shares in Cumann na h-Amharclainne Naisiunta Teo  
(National Theatre Society Ltd)



Uimhnr: 61

CUMANN NA h-AMHARCLAINNE NAISIUNTA TEO.

corpraithe faoi Acht na gCuideachtaí 1963  
Capiteal údraithe £3,000: trí mhíle scair-  
eagne dar luach £1 an ceann.

✠Corrigan & Wilson, Ltd., Dublin

Deimhníonn sé seo go bfuil Walter Macken

as Gort na Gaois Augherard Co. Galway

ina Shealbhadóir Cláraithe ar Dhá Céad

Scaireanna Láníoctha dár luach púnt an scair agus

lad uimhrithe ó 2045 go 2244 go h-iniatach faoi théarmaí Mheabhrán

agus Airteagail Chomhlachais Chumainn na h-Amharclainne Náisiúnta Teoranta.

Tugtha faoi Ghnáthshéala na Culdeachtan

an 10<sup>ú</sup> lá de mhí Lúasa 1965

Walter Macken  
Rúnaí

James Wilson  
Robert Jones  
Stiúrthóirí



## Appendix 5.3



Guthán  
Oifig na dTicéad 44505  
Oifig an Rónaí 43412

### AMHARCLANN NA MAINISTREACH

BLEÁ CLIATH, 2. ABBEY THEATRE, DUBLIN 2.

Dáta 13th September 1965.

Stiurthóir: EARNAN DE BLAGHD, ROIBEARD Ó FARACHAIN,

SÉAMUS DE BHILMOT, GAIBRIAL O FALLÚIN

Bainisteoir Stiúrtha: EARNAN DE BLAGHD

Rónaí: ERIC GORMAN

#### AMERICAN REVIEW OF "THE PILGRIM'S MOTHER"

An American named R. Jones, of Campbell-Eward Co. Adv., 3044 West Grand Boulevard, Detroit, Michigan 48202, who wrote asking for information about THE PILGRIM'S MOTHER has transmitted a photostat copy of a review published in VARIETY on August 4th. Presumably the review is by himself. It runs as follows:-

Irish-Americans in search of ancestral roots in the old country are chestnut jokes to the Irish, but Arnold Hill, a new Abbey writer, has pulled a neat switch on the theme to provide plenty of laughs for the customers. THE PILGRIM'S MOTHER is about a woman columnist who has built her deceased mother into a matriarch figure for U.S. readers, visits the town in Ireland from which the old lady emigrated.

The author is harder on his Irish characters than on the columnist and her manager and secretary from New York. He satirises the sacred cows of patriarchy and such stock Irish characters as the lecherous mayor, the thirty-balled singer, nervous maid and upper-class eccentrics.

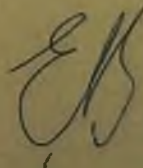
Joan O'Hara is a standout as the American columnist. She

has caught the character and holds it under control throughout piece. Her assistants, played by Philip Flynn and Kathleen Barron, are well-matched with Flynn as the manager and near-exuberant publicist concerned with the public image of his employer.

Michael Hennessy's Mayor projects a typical smalltown political leader, but the best characterization is by Pat Layde as an amiably oddball landowner.

Frank Deraody has directed the production lightly, keeping up the sense of action in the single hotel room setting, an imaginative combination of realism and impressionism by Brian Collins. Although the show opened without newspaper publicity, because of Dublin's prolonged printing strike, word-of-mouth has built up audiences and the comedy looks set for good run and should have possibilities for export. It's not a world-shaker, but is good, light entertainment.

Max.



## Appendix 5.4

Minutes of the EGM of the National Theatre Society Ltd  
9 October 1965

Minutes of an Extraordinary General Meeting of the National Theatre Society Ltd., held at Wynn's Hotel, 1r. Abbey Street, Dublin on Saturday 9th October 1965 at 2.30p.m.

Present: Mr. R. O'Farachain in the Chair,

Mr. Blythe, Dr. Wilmot, Mr. Fallon, Mairéad Uas.

Mí Ghraída, Lady Longford, Miss Rita Mooney, Mrs. Mary

O'Malley, Mr. A. Dasher, T. Uas. Luibhéad, Mr. L.

Marcus, Dr. S. O'Tuama, Prof. T. W. Moody, Dr.

D. Thornley, Mr. M. McGonigle, Prof. J. Murphy.

*B. Mac Mahon, B. Free, C. Curack*  
The Chairman introduced Mr. Walter Macken to the

meeting as the second director to be nominated by

the Minister for Finance. He expressed the Board's

satisfaction with the appointment and said Mr.

Macken was an eminently welcome appointee.

Minutes: The Minutes of the meeting held on 26th June 1965  
were read, confirmed and signed.

Re Item 3 on Agenda - Six productions to be announced in  
advance for presentation during the

first twelve months in the new Abbey Theatre.

The Board put before the meeting its selection of plays which  
are subject to any changes that may be suggested by events  
during the next five or six months. Six of the following  
seven plays would be produced during the period from 1st May  
1966 to 1st May 1967.

- |  |                 |
|--|-----------------|
| 1. THE PLOUGH AND THE STARS                  | O'Casey         |
| 2. CON THE SHAUGHRAUN                        | Boucicault      |
| 3. THE HOUSE OF BERNARDA ALBA                | Lorca           |
| 4. Bilingual Version of<br>WAITING FOR GODOT | Beckett-O'Brian |
| 5. LONG DAY'S JOURNEY INTO NIGHT             | O'Neill         |
| 6. THE PLAYBOY OF THE WESTERN WORLD          | Synge           |
| 7. HEARTBREAK HOUSE                          | Shaw.           |



The order in which the plays will be produced will depend on contemporary factors and could not be conveniently fixed in advance.

Msiread M. Ghráda commented that almost all the plays on the list had been done previously by the Abbey. She felt it would be better to break new ground.

It was agreed not to specify until a later date the play by Lorca: as counter suggestions of YEMMA and BLOOD WEDDING were put forward.

Mr. Cusack agreed to make available the Irish/English version of WAITING FOR GODOT before a final decision would be made on its presentation.

Mr. MacMahon asked whether a new interpretation of THE PLAYBOY OF THE WESTERN WORLD could be given and suggested that somebody with new ideas on the play might be given the production.

Dr. S. O'Tuama, describing the plays as established classics said he would like to see names like Max Frisch included.

Dr. B. Thornley regretted the absence of contemporary writers from the list.

Mr. Blythe said it was hoped to present THE COUNTESS CATHLEEN and THE PLOUGH AND THE STARS during the first week in the new Theatre. THE COUNTESS CATHLEEN was the first play performed by the Irish Literary Theatre and THE PLOUGH AND THE STARS was running at the time of the fire in 1951. Mrs. O'Malley said a case could be made for doing THE KING'S THRESHOLD instead. She considered it a better play than THE COUNTESS CATHLEEN and it would, therefore, be preferable particularly at the opening performance.

#### Re Item 4 on agenda - Completion of New Abbey

Mr. Blythe outlined progress and mentioned factors which have caused delays. He said the Architects were of the opinion that the project should be completed before 1st May 1966 but the builder was not yet prepared to specify a date. Revised plans for the Peacock Theatre were currently with the

Corporation for approval: the possible completion date for the Peacock is 1st June 1966.

Altogether it seemed at this stage that the opening would take place after the June 1966 summer holidays since a period of "running in" would be required.

Other business:- The Chairman read a request from An tOgas.

O'Dalaigh that a note should in future be inserted in the programme about the author's life and work.

Irish Life Competition: Mr. Elythe reported that as suggested by Mr. Casack at the last meeting he had been in communication with the Irish Life Assurance Company about the terms and conditions of future competitions for their £500 prize but had only a promise that the matter will be considered.

Competition for play in Irish: the Directors announced their intention of offering a £250 prize for a full length play in Irish in order to stimulate writing in Irish for the Peacock Theatre. Outside readers would be appointed to adjudicate.

After some discussion about the quality of various productions and about publicity the Chairman declared the meeting in favour of putting on the agenda for the next meeting the question raised by Mr. Friel regarding Standards of Acting and Production in the Abbey. Mr. Friel said that the proposal to appoint an Artistic Director which had been debated inconclusively at a meeting held on 15th May 1965 was to have been brought forward for discussion at a later meeting but had not yet appeared on the agenda. The

Chairman said the proposal regarding the Artistic Director would also be placed on the agenda for the next meeting.

Date of next meeting: It was proposed that the next meeting of shareholders should take place on the last Saturday in November.

The Chairman then declared the meeting closed.



## Appendix 5.5



Guthán  
Oifig na dTicéad 44505  
Oifig an Rónai 43412

### AMHARCLANN NA MAINISTREACH

BLEÁ CLIATH, 2. ABBEY THEATRE, DUBLIN 2.

*Data* 25th November 1965.

*Stiurthóirí:* EARNAN DE BLAGHD, ROIBEARD Ó FARACHAIN.

SÉAMUS DE BHILMOT, GAIBRIAL O FALLÚIN

*Bainisteoir Stiurtha:* EARNAN DE BLAGHD

*Rónai:* ERIC GORMAN

Mr. Walter Macken,  
Gort Na Ganiv,  
Oughterard,  
CO. GALWAY.

Dear ~~Walter~~ <sup>Walter</sup>,

We discussed the proposed terms and conditions of your appointment as Assistant Manager and Artistic Adviser last night.

I have now knocked the various points into shape and hope to get the O.K. of our solicitor to-morrow as well as word from the Directors that what I have written is what they meant. As soon as it is approved I shall send the draft to you for your consideration and, I hope, acceptance.

Meantime, we have arranged a Board Meeting for Thursday night 2nd December with a view to concluding the business and to having an announcement in Friday's papers before the shareholders' meeting on Saturday.

I hope it is sure that you will be able to be here on Thursday.

Yours sincerely,

*Earnan de Blaghd*



## Appendix 5.6

Suggested duties of Assistant Manager and Artistic Adviser (subsequently Director) proposed for the Abbey Theatre.

1. Assistant Manager with the right to succeed Manager within a stated period of time (say three months after the opening of the new Theatre but not later than 30 September, 1967).

Duties of Assistant Manager. To co-operate with Manager in all activities relating to the business aspect of the Theatre with a view to being in a position to take over full management until the position of Business Manager has been considered and made provision for in the personnel of the new Theatre.

2. Artistic Adviser (subsequently Artistic Director).

Duties of Artistic Adviser.

1. To be responsible, within the ideals and first principles of the founders of the Abbey Theatre (and the Theatre's Patent) for the direction of policy in the selection of plays.
2. To re-organise the existing company in accordance with above policy and particularly with a view to the possibilities of occasional touring.
3. To order and supervise the employment of guest players, producers, scenic artists, etc.
4. To consider the ultimate appointment of a Public Relations Officer and in the meantime to make provision for the adequate dissemination of publicity concerning the normal activities of the Theatre.
5. To examine and if necessary to re-organise the Players Council in order that there may be a continuous flow of ideas between the Artistic Adviser and that body.

6. To envisage as part of a long term plan the establishment on a profit-making basis of a National Academy of Theatre Arts in which students will be taught not only the elements of acting, speech-training, make-up, etc., but production, theatre design, the history of Irish and World Theatre. Since a number of shareholders have requested it, thought might be given to the establishment of a class in playwriting on something like the Professor Baker plan in the U.S.
7. Generally any duty which falls within the province of an Artistic Director.



## Appendix 5.7

The interview is continued on the next page

8

# DIRECTOR TALKS OF ABBEY'S FUTURE

## *Macken's appointment*

**M**R. WALTER MACKEN'S duties as artistic adviser to the Abbey Theatre, possible reorganisation of the players' council and the establishment of a national academy of theatre arts were among the subjects discussed by Mr. Gabriel Fallon, a director of the Abbey, in an interview with the *Irish Times*.

Mr. Fallon described the appointment of an artistic adviser as "a virtually progressive step towards bringing about those changes which the policy and control of a national theatre demands."

"I believe I am correct in saying that this view is held by most of the Abbey's new shareholders," he said. "At all events, the opinions expressed by them at the recent extraordinary general meeting in Wynn's Hotel were enthusiastically in favour of the appointment."

Why was the post one of "Adviser" and not "Director"?

—Well, one of the reasons is that it will be necessary for Mr. Macken to work in close co-operation with Mr. Blythe until the latter's retirement, so that he will be in a position, all going well, to take over complete control when that happens. Anyway, what's in a name? Mr. Macken's duties will be virtually those of an artistic director.

What will these duties be?

—First of all, he will be responsible within the ideals and first principles of the founders of the Abbey Theatre (and of the Theatre's patent) for the re-direction of policy in the selection of plays. At the moment the quality of Irish playwriting (if one excepts a handful of authors) is at a very low ebb.

### LEAVENING

It may be necessary, as happened before in the history of the Abbey Theatre, to leaven the programme policy with the production of contemporary works by contin-

—Mr. Macken is one of the two Government directors of the Abbey Theatre (Dr. Seamus Wilmot is the other). I cannot visualise the possibility of any clash. On the contrary Mr. Macken's duties as Artistic Adviser should help considerably in bringing the details of the Theatre's daily working more clearly to directorate level.

Are the directors of the Abbey Theatre subject to a retiring age?

—No, nor has this ever been the case. But, speaking for myself, I have already informed my fellow-directors of my intention to consider retirement within the next 18 months unless circumstances should compel me to do so before or after that period. I consider that the burden of the new Abbey Theatre along with the plans envisaged for it call for younger shoulders than mine.

The Abbey's exile in the Queen's has been for me, at all events, a most frustrating experience. The financial losses in that place have been appalling. The idea of attempting to inaugurate there any policy worthy of a national theatre is completely out of the question.

Is it the Abbey's intention to appoint a public relations officer?

—Speaking for myself I believe that the Abbey would benefit considerably by such an appointment. Much too much of the Theatre's activities, not to mention the

## LEAVENING

It may be necessary, as happened before in the history of the Abbey Theatre, to leaven the programme policy with the production of contemporary works by continental and other authors. At the meeting in Wynn's Hotel Mr. Macken outlined his plans in this respect in a manner which won general approval.

It will also be a part of Mr. Macken's duties to reorganise the existing company in accordance with the above policy; and, most particularly, with a view to exploring touring possibilities at home and abroad. He will be responsible also for the engagement and supervision of guest players, producers, scenic artists, etc. Many of the Abbey's former players have expressed the wish to re-appear, at their own and the Theatre's convenience, on the stage of the Abbey Theatre. This, in my opinion, would be a most commendable project.

Extended to producers and scenic designers it could include such distinguished theatre personalities as Hugh Hunt, Tanya Mosiewitch, Shelah Richards and, indeed, many others. I imagine, too, that Mr. Macken will find it necessary to reorganise the existing Players' Council in such a manner that there will be a continuous flow of ideas between the players and the directors."

A national academy of theatre arts will be part of a long-term plan which Mr. Macken will have to consider. There is a crying need for an institution (somewhat on the lines of the Comedie-Francaise in which students will be taught not only the elements of acting (in the Abbey Theatre tradition), speech-training, make-up, etc., but production, design and the history of Irish and world theatre.

Since a number of the Abbey's shareholders have requested it, thought will have to be given to the possibility of establishing a class in play-writing, something on the lines of Professor Baker's famous class in the U.S. One of the Abbey's shareholders (Mrs. Mary O'Malley, of Belfast) is particularly anxious that the proposed academy should cater for children. Her own Lyric Theatre has done so most successfully.

As Mr. Macken is also a director of the Abbey Theatre, will this not clash with his work as Artistic Adviser?

question.

Is it the Abbey's intention to appoint a public relations officer?

—Speaking for myself I believe that the Abbey would benefit considerably by such an appointment. Much too much of the Theatre's activities, not to mention the difficulties that beset them, are left to rumour and surmise. Anything that would help to bring the Abbey Theatre closer to the people, and the people closer to the Abbey Theatre would be of benefit. I feel that the appointment of a P.R.O. would be a step in this direction.

Is Mr. Walter Macken the ideal person for the post of Artistic Adviser?

—Mr. Macken was the unanimous choice of the directors. This choice was enthusiastically endorsed by the Abbey's shareholders. I cannot think of a better man. Mr. Macken is an experienced actor, producer and playwright who has managed the Taibhdhearc, Galway's Gaelic theatre, with considerable success. He is, moreover, a man of ideas and it is up to the directors to see these ideas are given full play.

It is part of his terms of appointment that he shall be allowed, if he wishes to do so, to visit and study at English and continental theatre venues, but I see no reason for this at the moment. All his talent, time and energy will be needed for concentration on the new Abbey Theatre, in which, incidentally, well over half-a-million of public money has been invested.

In any case he has already on his production staff at the Abbey a man with considerable continental experience. Tomas MacAnna, in addition to other extra-mural activities, has not only produced a number of plays at the National Theatre in Iceland, but he has studied the production methods of the Berliner Ensemble under the personal direction of Helen Weigel, Bertolt Brecht's widow, a fact which made his "Galileo" such an outstanding success. In the light of Mr. Macken's appointment I look forward with hope and not without confidence, to a new era in the history of the Abbey Theatre.



## Appendix 5.8

### THE NATIONAL THEATRE SOCIETY LIMITED

#### REPORT OF THE DIRECTORS

to be presented to the Shareholders at the Annual General Meeting to be held at Wynn's Hotel, Lower Abbey Street, Dublin, on Saturday, the 19th day of March 1966 at 2.30 p.m.

-----  
The Directors present herewith the Accounts of the Company for the year ended 30th June 1965 which show a loss of after charging:-

£            £  
43757

Directors Emoluments  
Auditors Remuneration

1800  
200  
2000

To which must be added the Nominal Value of Shares allotted as fully paid in consideration of aid and advice to be given by allottees to the Directors  
The loss forward from the last Account is

1454  
46808  
92019

The following Government Grants were received during the year to 30.6.1965:-

Balance for year ended 5th April 1965	17000	
On account of year ended 5th April 1966	<u>15000</u>	32000
		<u>60019</u>

Mr. Gabriel Fallon retires by rotation and being eligible offers himself for re-election.

Mr. Walter Macken retires under Article 6 and being eligible offers himself for re-election.

Your Auditors, Messrs. F. R. O'Connor & Co. Chartered Accountants have agreed to continue in office in accordance with Section 160 (2) of the Companies Act 1963.

ERNEST BLYTHE  
ROBERT O'FARACHAIN } Directors

208/210 Pearse Street,  
Dublin, 2.  
24th February 1966.

## Appendix 5.9

Extract from the Abbey Board meeting on the 21 April 1966 on the state of preparations for the return of the Abbey Theatre Company to new theatre building.

### NEW BUILDING

After having consulted further with Mr. Scott's office and having paid due heed to the opinions of the Clerk of Works Mr. Casserly and of Leslie Scott, we decided that we could risk announcing that the new theatre will open on 18th July, if no totally unforeseen hold-up occurs. If such an adverse factor should arise we could at least have a Press Conference or something of the kind in the new building on 18th July and have the first performance either in the middle of that week or during the next week. In view of the attitude of Shareholders in regard to the announcement of plans, I thought it well to circularise the news to them on Monday.

It will be a big job to get up the opening programme which Mr. Macken is preparing and in which both Frank Dermody and Tomás MacAnna will participate on the production side, Mr. Dermody looking after the acting

principally and Mr. McCann largely looking after the mechanical side and the spectacle. Work for the show will take up a great deal of time. More rehearsal will be needed than for an ordinary show. The players have agreed that instead of being on holidays for the whole of June they will go away for the first fortnight of the month and then return for intensive rehearsal. During this second fortnight the theatre will remain closed because rehearsals will be going on not only in the mornings and afternoons but also at night.



## Appendix 5.10

A copy of the handwritten draft of Walter Macken's letter of resignation from his posts at the Abbey Theatre

### Statement

I was invited to become a Director on the Board of the National Theatre Society and was appointed in July 1966. On March 1, I took up a position of AA with the Abbey Theatre for a trial period on March 1, 1967, on the understanding that when Mr. Pelyth retired as Managing Director, I would probably have now served nearly a year as a successful Director and 3 months as Artistic Adviser. I am resigning both positions as I do not feel that I would be the suitable man to succeed Mr. Pelyth for the following reasons.

- ① I am a professional writer; it is what I love most, and if I were to devote all the time needed to this permanent post in the Abbey Theatre, I would have to abandon creative writing.
- ② Even if I was to sacrifice my writing, I have become used to living in the west of Ireland, and find that living in Dublin suits neither my temperament nor my health. At my age - 51 - it is impossible to uproot ~~myself~~ <sup>myself</sup> from a rural area and live in a city.
- ③ I am submitting my resignation now because I feel it would be extremely dishonest to let people think I was going to accept this post when I have no intention of doing so.

I would like to say that since I became involved with the Abbey I have received nothing but encouragement and kindness from Mr. Pelyth, the Board of Directors and all associated with the Abbey and regret that I am forced by my own <sup>logic and health</sup> ~~logic and health~~ to the decision.

## Appendix 5.11

2 letters received by Walter Macken arising from his resignation from the Abbey Theatre

TELEGRAMS } PUBLISH LONDON WC2  
CABLES }  
TELEPHONE } TEMPLE BAR 6623  
CODE 8TH AND 6TH EDITIONS ABC  
PLEASE QUOTE ADM/EJM

MACMILLAN & CO LTD  
LITTLE ESSEX STREET  
LONDON WC2  
13th June, 1966.

Walter Macken, Esq.,  
Gort-na-Ganiv,  
Oughterard,  
Co. Galway.

*My Dear Walter*

Tess has just told me about your decision to resign from the Abbey and this is only to say that, sad though it is, I am sure you are right to do so. You are after all a writer first and always, and this, together with your health, must be the primary consideration.

Unwind as gently as you can and I hope you will be over again soon.

*Yours ever*  
*A.D. Maclean*

A.D. Maclean



# RADIO ÉIREANN

---

Sráid Anraí, Baile Átha Cliath 1. Tel: 42981

16th June, 1966

Mr. Walter Macken,  
Gort-na-Ganiv,  
Oughterard,  
Co. Galway

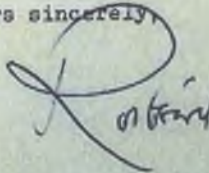
Dear Walter,

Forgive me for not replying sooner to your letter of June 2nd. I have been on a short period of leave, and frankly tried to ignore all correspondence until I came back to work.

I very much want you to know that I greatly regret your resignation from the Board and from the post of artistic adviser. I had a happy feeling that things were going well from the moment you came into the Theatre, and I had great hopes that your work would be a big success. However, the reasons you give for your decision make it clear that they are personal, and therefore no one has the right to gainsay them. I am very grateful to know from you that it was not anything in your relations with any of the Directors or with the Company which led you to this decision. It would have been very distressing if such a reason existed.

While again lamenting your forthcoming absence, may I wish you every peace and happiness in your beloved West.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to be 'Robert', written in a cursive style.

## Appendix 5.12

# RECALL THE YEARS

A stage history of the Abbey Theatre  
from its founding in 1904 to its burning in 1951.

SCRIPTED BY WALTER MACKEN

### CAST

Micheal O hAonghusa, Harry Brogan,  
Kathleen Barrington, Micheal O Briain, Niall Buggy,  
Eileen Crowe, Sile O Connell, Desmond Cave,  
May Craig, Sinead Cusack, Flann O'Connor,  
Donal McCann, Maire Ni Dhomhnaill, Vincent Dowling,  
Fiona Fitzgerald, Philip O Flynn, Bill Foley,  
Austin Fox, Geoffrey Golden, Eric Gorman,  
Edward Golden, Brenda McGuinn,  
Joan O'Hara, Fred Johnson, Aideen O'Kelly,  
Jack Kelly, Thomas McKenna, Pat Laffan, Pat Layde,  
Peadar O Luain, Gearoid O Lochlainn, Maire Millar,  
Maire Ni Neill, Angela Newman, Chris O'Neill,  
Deirdre Purcell, Stephen Rea.

### VOICES

Siobhan McKenna, Ray MacAnally,  
Micheal Mac Liammoir, Gabriel Fallon, Cyril Cusack.

*There will be filmed extracts from the following films*

RIDERS TO THE SEA \* JUNO AND THE PAYCOCK  
STRANGER AT MY DOOR \* ODD MAN OUT  
DUBLIN'S FAIR CITY \* CRADLE OF GENIUS  
GOING MY WAY \* TALK OF A MILLION

*to show the following Abbey Players*

Sara Allgood, Maire O'Neill, Shelah Richards,  
Ria Mooney, Barry Fitzgerald, Maureen Delaney,  
W. G. Fay, Michael Dolan, F. J. McCormick.

We thank Radio Telefís Éireann for the use of a recording of Maire O'Neill's voice in  
RIDERS TO THE SEA.

## SEQUENCE OF SCENES

1. At Coole Park.
2. First production THE COUNTESS CATHLEEN.
3. Gaiety Theatre, 1900, DIARMUID AND GRANIA  
and CASADH AN tSUGAIN.
4. St. Teresa's Hall, Clarendon Street, 1902/1904.
5. The Abbey Theatre, 1904/1908.
6. The banning of THE SHEWING UP OF BLANCO POSNET,  
1909.

*Interval fifteen minutes*

7. Departure of Miss Horniman.
8. Abbey Players' first American Tour, 1911.
9. 1916.
10. Sean O'Casey.
11. "Those were Players". Filmed performances  
of famous Abbey Players.
12. 1927-1951—A Convocation of Characters.

---

Production: Tomas Mac Anna, Frank Dermody, Edward Golden.

Stage Manager: Joe Ellis.

Scenery designed by Tomas MacAnna  
and painted by Robert Heade and Brian Collins.



# WALTER MACKEN

Artistic Adviser to the Abbey Theatre

'...AS I SEE IT ONE OF MY MAIN FUNCTIONS WILL BE TO HAVE EVERYONE IN IRELAND, TALKING, EATING, WRITING, DREAMING ABBEY THEATRE'

**W**ALTER MACKEN is taking up his new post as artistic adviser to the Abbey Theatre on March 1 next. Not alone is the creation of the position interesting in itself, but the appointment is more so, for Mr. Macken is considered to be connected more with the writing side of the business than the executive or administrative side, although he was managing director at Taibhdhearc na Gallimhe for some years.

**Q.** How do you feel about your new appointment?

**A.** My feelings about this appointment are mixed. As a writer who has lived for 15 years in the West it is quite a wrench to go and live again in a city. On the other hand, anyone who has ever worked for the Abbey will tell you of the sort of disease it engenders, a sort of love-hate relationship. It has an attraction for people who have ever worked there, which cannot be put into words. A good number of the company are my friends; we know one another well and I'm looking forward to working with them again.

**Q.** What exactly will your functions be?

**A.** Only time will tell. Everyone will have to become in-

voled in the new theatre, you who ask the questions, and your readers, with the directors, the shareholders, the company, the technical staff, the office staff; in fact everybody in the country who has the interest of the theatre at heart. After all the new Abbey will belong to the people since in a way it was their money that made it possible. It will be up to us, inside, to aim at high standards of production, acting and presentation, and the people outside to support and criticise. So as I see it, one of my main functions will be to have everybody in Ireland, talking, eating, writing, dreaming Abbey Theatre.

**Q.** Do you consider the new post as an indication of a change in policy or just as an extension of it?

You must realise that the Abbey Theatre as such has been away from home and wandering in lodgings for a long time, 14 years. Conditions were not easy. The Queen's Theatre was a difficult one to function in successfully for many reasons. Going into a new theatre will mean part of the battle won already. The basic policy of the Abbey will not change. It was created to provide a place where Irish drama could be encouraged and performed. This will remain its primary policy.

**Q.** Accepting that you will be greatly responsible for the selec-

tion of new plays, do you as an Abbey playwright, think that you know the type of play that the Abbey needs?

**A.** Who knows what "type" of play any theatre needs? The age of O'Casey, Synge, Yeats, was a different time. You had all the drama of poverty, insurrection, patriotism, Irish mythology. These are different times. They will provide different themes, which our playwrights will have to search out for themselves. They will have to look around at this odd modern Ireland and see the drama in it. Its there, somewhere, but it needs their inspiration to find it. While man lives he is dramatic. It is just that playwrights have to look at the change in his environment.

**Q.** What do you really think of the present state of Irish playwrighting and is it all that bad?

**A.** As long as young men are writing plays, I don't care what kind of plays they are writing. All plays cannot be works of genius. Most theatres in the world have to get by on good plays, competently written, until the outstanding playwright comes along. No person can become a really good playwright overnight. It takes time. But there must be somewhere that he can see his plays performed, so that he can learn from them to do better.

**Q.** Would the presentation of contemporary European plays

help the lethargic condition prevalent in our theatre today?

**A.** I think a National Theatre should display to its own people the arts and cultures of other nations. Contemporary drama is an expression, as seen through the eyes of the artists, of the lives and loves and hatreds and moods of his own people. You could get a deeper insight into the people of Finland, Russia, Scandinavia, Italy, Spain, France, etc. by seeing them through the eyes of their playwrights, than you would by travelling ignorantly.

**Q.** What are your intentions in respect of modern drama?

**A.** I have no "intentions." Just wanting. We will welcome modern drama with open arms.

**Q.** Is enough being done to encourage new writers?

**A.** I don't think enough is being done to encourage new writers. Having once been a new writer myself, I can sense what should be done in the way of encouragement, and will try and do it.

**Q.** Have you any opinions on the frequency of revivals at the Abbey and how do you feel about the staging of the theatre's classics?

**A.** In any repertory theatre, revivals are at times necessary, depending on the success of new plays, or their abrupt failure, you must always have plays to fall back on. The more prosperous the state of Irish playwrighting





## Appendix 5.14

### UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, DAVIS

BERKELEY • DAVIS • IRVINE • LOS ANGELES • RIVERSIDE • SAN DIEGO • SAN FRANCISCO



SANTA BARBARA • SANTA CRUZ

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

DAVIS, CALIFORNIA 95616

August 27, 1965

Dear Walter,

Here is the list I promised you. I'm afraid it's all higgledy-piggledy and not in much order, but I've been swamped with university busy work since I got home.

I've listed plays that I think are good enough to be revived by long established dramatists, as well as new plays by new men. I also listed a bunch of plays not originally done by the Abbey but that could well be taken over into the national repertoire as much for their own worth as for encouraging their authors to write for the Abbey. The list reflects my own prejudice that a theatre ought to stage as many plays as it possibly can, that it should constantly revive the best in its own past repertoire, and that it should almost never reject a play by a dramatist who has won his spurs. That last point may seem a bit uncritical, but the Abbey has lost a great deal of superb work by people like O'Casey and Paul Carroll and Denis Johnston and Behan and John Keane and, in the case of Fitzmaurice I think it pushed out of the theatre a man of easily the stature of Synge. A lot of the younger writers like Douglas and Gallivan and Farrington have been so bruised by stupid rejections that they would not now consider offering a play to the Abbey. In other words, if I were running such a theatre I would open the Gates wide to all but the obviously hopeless drivel; after all, plays that seem not quite superb or faulty but with nice things in them can always be staged simply in the experimental theatre, or even given merely a staged reading. I'm sorry, I didn't mean to get carried away so didactically and impertinantly: here's the list.

GEORGE FITZMAURICE: his 17 plays were by far the most impressive single body of work that I ran across; he had from 1907 to 1923 three or four plays done at the Abbey, and then very few productions till the end of his life in 1963. There is, however, only one really bad play in this mass of work, and there are three unqualified masterpieces -- one is the well-known THE DANDY DOLLS; one is THE ENCHANTED LAND (published in THE DUBLIN MAGAZINE, Jan-Mar, 1957, and never produced), and one is THE OINTMENT BLUE, a typescript found in his papers at his death. You can get any of Fitzmaurice's plays from Liam Miller at the Dolmen Press who is going to publish them in three volumes. Really, this is superb stuff, and about a third of the plays have never seen the stage. I'd rank him easily with Synge; if this seems a bit fulsome, it's not merely my opinion -- Austin Clarke, Seumas O'Sullivan, and a lot of others have felt the same way.

The most impressive of the new men were, I thought, BRIAN FRIEL, JAMES DOUGLAS, CONOR FARRINGTON, AND JOHN B. KEANE. And I myself would offer to do any play they would care to submit. All of them are at present working on new plays, but some of their previous work which has been produced elsewhere than at the Abbey might be worth reviving. For instance: Friel's PHILADELPHIA HERE I COME, Douglas's NORTH CITY TRAFFIC, STRAIGHT AHEAD and THE ICE GODDESS, or Keane's SHARON'S GRAVE, MANY YOUNG MEN OF TWENTY, & THE



#### YEAR OF THE HIKER.

Not quite in their league but still pretty good are certainly Tomas Coffey and G. P. GALLIVAN. I don't know Coffey's new work, but Gallivan has several unproduced plays such as COLLEEN, A BEGINNING OF TRUTH, and CAMFOBASSO, which is on at this year's Theatre Festival. Some of his earlier history plays would be worth, I think, reviving at the Abbey: DECISION AT EASTER, MOURN THE IVY LEAF, & THE STEPPING STONE.

HUGH LEONARD has been once produced at the Abbey, but A WALK ON THE WATER could be revived, and plays like THE POKER SESSION & STEPHEN D might well be taken over into the Abbey repertoire.

BEHAN has three one-acts which are not superb, but which are fun and which as curtain raisers might help to bring some people into the theatre. THE BIG HOUSE is published in BRENDAN BEHAN'S ISLAND, and the two others were once produced by John Molloy at the Gate, and he might have copies.

JOHN O'DONOVAN was finally pushed away from the Abbey by what he considered the atrocious production of COPPERFACED JACK -- indeed, he told me that he was so incensed that he dashed into Mr. Blythe's office and began to throttle him. I've read the revised version of this play (I've heard the original was bad), and it seems to me a dandy play. He's also revised THE SHAW'S OF SYNGE STREET, and he has a new, long, rather randy satiric fantasy which needs a bit of cutting, but which is pretty funny.

I'd think that Seamus Byrne's DESIGN FOR A HEADSTONE might well be revived and that the last version of LITTLE CITY could be done.

SEAMUS DE BURCA has a reputation as a kind of latter day Boucicault, but two of his plays are quite fine: THE HOWARDS and LIMPID RIVER, the last of which he's just revised at my suggestion.

JOSEPH TOMELTY has a couple of plays which might be revived like ALL SOUL'S NIGHT & IS THE PRIEST AT HOME? And he also has a number of new scripts, which strike me as rather difficult but interesting. The best of them, I thought, was one called THE SENSITIVE MAN.

I would think the Abbey could make money by doing SAM THOMPSON'S OVER THE BRIDGE & THE EVANGELIST. No one connected with Thompson seems to have scripts of either at the moment, although I was able to run down a faulty copy of OVER THE BRIDGE.

I'd think that Gerard Healy's fine plays THE BLACK STRANGER & THY DEAR FATHER could be revived.

LADY LONGFORD has quite a quiverfull of nicely done modern comedies and adroit histories. Among the histories I like best THE EARL OF STRAW. All of them are published either by Hodges Figgis or P. J. Bourke.

MAURICE MELODON's poorest play was once done at the Abbey, but his two good plays have never been revived since their first hole-in-the-corner productions: AISLING (published by Progress House) and THE PURPLE PATH TO THE POPPY FIELDS (in NEW WORLD WRITING, #5)

Neither AUSTIN CLARKE nor JACK B. YEATS is quite my cup of tea as dramatists, but I don't quite trust my own taste, and things like THE VISCOUNT OF BLARNEY or IN SAND might well be done.

Of some of the older people, I think George SHIELDS last play, which I think is unproduced, SLAVE DRIVERS is one of the best things he ever did. There is a Ms. at the Authors' Guild in Clare St. I don't believe that Louis D'Alton's CAFFLIN JOHNNY was ever produced, but it's a charming and finally rather poignant minor play; Bourke's of Dame St. have a Ms. Of course, the best of Robinson ought to be revived, but you might consider his adaptation of Boule de Suif which was done at the Gate during the war under the title of ROLY POLY -- a really neatly done job. ROBERT COLLIS's MARROWBONE LANE might well be revived, and Mayne's BRIDGEHEAD is still a beautiful play, and MACNAMARA'S tragedy MARGARET GILLAN, although the plot gets a bit involved, should be awfully strong on the stage.

I'd think that MAC LIAMMOIR'S fantasy ILL MET BY MOONLIGHT would still be awfully popular, particular if you could attract Edwards to do the lead again. MARY MANNING's THE VOICES OF SHEM would be worth doing, and she is at present working on an adaptation of O'Connor's CRAB APPLE JELLY. And, indeed, why not revive some of the plays that O'Connor wrote in the thirties -- or O'Faolain's SHE HAD TO DO SOMETHING is a pretty nice light comedy.

Bryan MacMahon's three Abbey plays certainly ought to be kept in the permanent repertoire -- especially THE HONEY SPIKE & THE SING OF THE ANVIL. Beautiful work.

I'd try and woo CARROLL back; he's got a new, unproduced play called THE WOMAN FROM NOWHERE AT ALL; I don't totally like it, but it's worth doing. Or SHADOW AND SUBSTANCE, THE OLD FOOLISHNESS, & THE DEVIL CAME FROM DUBLIN might be revived. Or, one of his best plays, the Glasgow one GREEN CARS GO EAST. Or, the recent TV version of his Swift play.

I'd revive the best of Johnston -- especially that dazzling play THE GOLDEN CUCKOO. THE DREAMING DUST I know from having produced it once is a very strong play.

And especially I'd do all of those O'Caseys that have never been done in Ireland. After all, he's one of your great men, and I don't think any piddling reservations ought to keep him off the stage. I've done some of the later plays, and I think that THE DRUMS OF FATHER NED is a magnificent job in his later manner. And BEHIND THE GREEN CURTAINS -- Gabriel Fallon be damned -- should work excellently in Dublin. And some of the better one-acts, especially TIME TO GO. And it's about time that NANNIE'S NIGHT OUT should be seen again in Dublin; there's a copy of it in my FEATHERS FROM THE GREEN CROW book. It's in the same manner as JUNO & was written right after it.

And, of course, I would revive all I could of Molloy and of yourself. I'd do FRIDAY'S MEN & THE VISITING HOUSE especially. And, of yours, I'd certainly do DOOLIN & VACANT POSSESSION & TWILIGHT OF A WARRIOR.

Great Scott, have I forgotten JOHN BULL'S OTHER ISLAND?

Well, this is probably enough. I really think there is God's plenty here of brilliant or first-rate or -- in no pejorative sense -- very fine second-rate work. Enough superb stuff to really revitalize a theatre, if enough of it were done. I hope I haven't sounded too didactic, especially too you, for you know enormously more about the theatre than I.

And finally apologies for such a long letter, and my best wishes to you and Mrs. Macken. All the best.

Bob Hogan —

P.S.

*I read with pleasure your Sullivan the other day.*

## **Chapter 6: The Playwright**

### **Appendices 6.1-6.12**



## List of known Walter Macken plays and other writings for the theatre

## Appendix 6.1

Year	Title Name	Type	Language	Length	Location	Cast size	Folder	Note
1 1935	<b>1</b> <i>An Sceir Criobheil</i>	Drama	Irish	1 Act	BUW	13M	23	)
2 1935	<i>The Coral Reef</i>	Drama	English	1 Act	BUW	13M	23	)
3 1939	<b>2</b> <i>Flat to Let</i>	Drama	English	1 Act	BUW	3M, 2W	52, 23	
4 1941	<i>Caithreim Sclabhaide</i>	Verse Drama	Irish		BUW		77	
5 1941	<b>3</b> <i>Uncle Peter</i>	Comedy	English	1 Act	BUW	7M, 5W	71	
6 1941	<i>Lucy Callaghan's Father</i>	Comedy/farce	English	3 Act	BUW	7M, 3W	58, 66	
7 1941	<i>Ring for Langford Jones</i>	Comedy	English	3 Act	BUW	7M, 5W	110	
8 1941	<i>Rude Forefathers</i>	Comedy	English	3 Act	BUW	7M, 5W	111, 59	
9 1943	<b>4</b> <i>An Cailin Aimsir Abu</i>	Comedy/farce	Irish	3 Act	<b>Published</b>	5M, 3W		
10 1943	<b>5</b> <i>Bhi Mac Agam Trath</i>	Drama	Irish	1 Act	BUW	4M, 2W	105, 75	
11 1943	<i>Salute the Servant</i>	Comedy/farce	English	3 Act	BUW	5M, 3W	66	
12 1944	<b>6</b> <i>Oighreach na Mara</i>	Drama	Irish	3 Act	<b>Published</b>	6M, 3W	74	
13 1945	<b>7</b> <i>An Fear ón Spideal.</i>	Comedy	Irish	3 Act	<b>Published</b>	7M, 5W	76	NLI
14 1945	<i>The Man from Spiddal</i>	Comedy	English	3 Act	BUW	7M, 5W	59	
15 1945	<i>Pairt Thaidg</i>	Comedy	English	3 Act	BUW	7M, 6W	102, 73B	
17 1946	<b>8</b> <i>Mungo's Mansion</i>	Drama	English	3 Act	<b>Published</b>	6M, 3W	55	M/S: NLI
18 1947	<i>Claddagh Days</i>	Poetic Drama	English	1st Movement	BUW		104	unfinished
19 1948	<b>9</b> <i>The Boys Come Home</i>	Comedy	English	3 Act	BUW	8M, 8W	97, 43	
20 1948	<i>Gaels in the Gantry</i>	Drama	English	2 Act	BUW	8M, 2W	100	
21 1948	<i>Three Days in the Gantry</i>	Drama	English	2 Act	BUW	8M, 2W	68	
21 1948	<b>10</b> <i>Vacant Possession</i>	Drama	English	3 Act	<b>Published</b>	8M, 2W	107, 81	
23 1948	<b>11</b> <i>The Whistling Woman</i>	Drama	English	Short Play	BUW	5M, 3W	72	
16 1949	<b>12</b> <i>Types and Shadows</i>	Drama	English	3 Act	BUW	12M, 5W	106	
25 1952	<b>13</b> <i>Home is the Hero</i>	Drama	English	3 Act	<b>Published</b>	5M, 5W	56, 57	
26 1954	<b>14</b> <i>The Boola Boy</i>	Drama	English	3 Act	BUW	4M, 3W	96, 42	
27 1955	<b>15</b> <i>Twilight of a Warrior</i>	Drama	English	3 Act	<b>Published</b>	6M, 3W	101	M/S: NLI
28 1958	<b>16</b> <i>Look in the Looking Glass</i>	Drama	English	3 Act	NLI	6M, 4W		M/S: NLI
31 1958	<b>17</b> <i>Saint on a Sunday</i>	Drama	English	3 Act	BUW	8M, 4W	65, 95	
29 1960	<b>20a</b> <i>The Last Gentleman</i>	Drama	English	3 Act	BUW	7M, 4W	57	
30 1960	<b>18</b> <i>The Voices of Doolin</i>	Drama	English	3 Act	BUW & Self	4M, 4W	17, 40, 94	
24 1961	<b>19</b> <i>The Instigator</i>	Drama	English	1 Act	BUW	Cast 14	55	
32 1962	<i>Son et Lumiere</i>	Light Show	English		BUW		39	no record
33 1963	<b>20b</b> <i>Merchants Road</i>	Drama	English	3 Act	BUW	7M, 3W	60	
34 1966	<i>Recall the Years</i>	Multi Media	English	Review	BUW		40	M/S: NLI
35 1967	<i>God's Own Country</i>	Musical	English	Musical	Ultan Macken			<b>Musical</b>

Note: The play titles coloured brown, red, blue and pink, indicate versions of the same play.

23/03/2010

## Appendix 6.2

### ***SALUTE THE SERVANT MAID.***

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#### **SYNOPSIS.**

**Act I.** Sorcha, the new servant maid, has landed in the household of a family in any big city in Ireland. The household consists of Seoirse, the man of the house, who, having retired from his job, has taken to writing for a pastime. He is a believer in authors first putting into practice what they are going to write in their books. This has caused a lot of people a lot of pain, including himself, but more particularly his wife, Nora, who thinks he has gone crazy. His inattention to her over a period of years has caused her to become somewhat caustic with life. She takes in lodgers to give her a pastime. Hayseed is a young man given to telling stories he heard on the Stock Exchange, and is that most obnoxious of human beings, a back-slapper. Gribble is a droodling old man in his dotage who keeps a lot of money in his room so that he can gloat over it. Cait is the cook, and Timin is a policeman who is an ardent sampler of her cooking, surreptitiously. George, who is writing a story about a burglar, enlists the aid of Timin, whom he informs that he is going to steal the money from Gribble's room in order to get atmosphere for a book. Timin, after a lot of persuasion agrees, the idea being that while Timin is conducting an inquiry into the loss of the money, Timin will get it from Seoirse and leave it back in Gribble's room. And everybody will be happy. Something goes wrong.

**Act II.** The night of the robbery. The lawyer Mullins calls on Sorcha and informs her that an uncle who died in America has



left her twenty thousand pounds. Seoirse steals Gribble's money. Gribble nearly has apoplexy. Somebody puts off the lights and steals the money from Seoirse, hitting him on the head for good measure. Timin is nearly driven frantic at the loss, and conducts a hilarious inquiry and a searching inquest into the loss. Surprisingly enough, the money is found after everybody has insulted everybody else to the greatest extent.

**Act III.** Sorchá, with a fortune of twenty thousand in sight, is a different person to the little poor girl from Castlegar. The lawyer, Mullins, seems to admire her charms, so does Mr. Hayseed, and even old Gribble is not beyond having a try, "hoisting his colours in the Matrimonial Stakes," much to his own discomfiture. Nora has plans for Sorchá too, dresses her like a queen, and proposes to marry her to one of her own relatives. Sorchá's mother, who has to undergo an operation which will cost two hundred pounds, arouses the sympathies of Nora, who decides to give Sorchá the money until her own arrives. That is all the information that can be given in the synopsis, as the surprise ending will explain itself and will, we are sure, endear an mailin aimsire to the audience.



# "HERITAGE OF THE SEA"



## SYNOPSIS.

**Act I.—Saturday Night:** The kitchen of Mairtin Breathnach's home in the Claddagh. Mairtin and his helper, Paitin Hegarty, return from a very successful fishing trip and sit to a well-earned meal, which is interrupted by the tactless remarks of Pat concerning Mairtin's son, Sean, who, declining to follow the footsteps of his father, has become manager of a shop in Galway. This turning of his back on the sea, and his choice of a girl called Sorcha Ni Neachtain as a sweetheart, excites Pat's disgust. The argument reaching a climax, Pat retires in high dudgeon. Mairtin and his wife, Peig, talk about their son, and it is obvious that Mairtin is deeply disappointed over his son's choice of a career. His daughter, Nora, looking for some of the spoils of the fishing, and her young man, Timin, return him to his habitual good humour. A young student, Tom, a friend of Sean, calls to see his friend, who generally brings Sorcha to his parents' home every Saturday night—much to everyone's discomfort. Mairtin, having heard from Timin that there is an English trawler in the bay, arranges with him that they will go out the following night and try to tackle the Englishmen. He follows Pat to the nearest pub. Sean and Sorcha arrive. Sean is obviously uncomfortable with Tom—Sorcha positively disliking him. Indeed, Sorcha seems to dislike everybody but herself. Nora returns to show her dislike of Sorcha, and to inform Sean that the detective, Sean O Domhnall, is looking for him. Mairtin returns assisting Pat—who is maith go leor—and Pat's tactlessness bursts an atmosphere overloaded with tension.

**Act II.—Sunday Night:** On a Claddagh pier opposite Long Walk. The boats are ready to go out after the trawler, having first made certain that the trawler is still there. Timin fixes the date of his wedding to Nora; Sean O Domhnall, the detective, arrives looking for Sean, and hints that they will be foolish to go hunting a trawler which, on account of the war, is armed against aeroplanes. Sean arrives with a reluctant Sorcha. He has obviously been drinking, and, for a person who professes to loathe his father's profession, behaves very peculiarly—indeed, one might say that he is even jealous of his friend Tom taking his place in his father's boat. His taunting of Tom and of his father breaks the latter's patience. He strikes his son, and the boat sets sail. Sean O Domhnall arrives on the scene, and is curious about Sean's application for a passport to England.

**Act III.—Monday Morning:** The same as Act I. Nora goes to meet the boat. Sean, who has been out all night, has an enlightening chat with his mother. Tom enters to tell them about the tragedy. From this all events are controlled by it, and are heightened by the information that Sean has been sacked, that Sorcha deserts him, that their lives are in a tangle. Each one of them from here takes a hand, adding his piece here and his piece there, to carry on a struggling dynasty on which the lives of the Claddagh people are founded—their heritage of the sea.

## Appendix 6.4

### DÓIB SIÚD AR BEAGÁN SAELGE

#### ACT I

Séamus Ó Máille was a butcher in Cork. He invented a sausage machine and is now "The Sausage King of Ireland," is extremely wealthy and is living in Dublin. His hobby is the collection of expensive gold items. His wife, Áine, has "grand notions." She employs a butler, Mac Bradáin, and a maid, Nóra; throws lavish parties attended by the "best" people, including bohemians such as Bigín Ní Bheagáin (an artist), Ruadhri San Máirtín (a writer), and Micheál Mac Iarainn (an actor). Her hobby is the collection of proverbs and the profound statements of her acquaintances. Áine's mother, Bean Uí Néill, is uncomfortable in her new surroundings and hankers after her normal life in Cork. Her hobby is the study of the works of Aldous Huxley. Máire, daughter of Séamus and Áine, has a hobby of collecting boy-friends, including her constant companion, the shy, bashful Persy Ó Conchubhair.

At the start of the play, Máire returns from Spiddal to announce her engagement—not to Persy, but to a man from Spiddal, Tadhg Ó Tuathail. Áine is horrified. She insists on Séamus putting an end to the nonsense. Máire is firm. She is so sure of her love that

---

she has brought Tadhg to Dublin to meet her parents. The marriage is to take place in a fortnight. Tadhg has brought his friend, Micilín Ó Cualáin, with him. Séamus proceeds to discuss the situation with the two men, but is interrupted by the arrival of his latest acquisition, a £5,000 gold statuette. The two Spiddal men, obviously have something on their minds and decide to take Séamus into their confidence.

## *ACT II*

A week later. A party is in full swing. The butler discovers that Nóra is in love with Tadhg. The unhappy Persy is compelled by Bean Uí Néill to drink brandy to enable him to "discover himself." The three bohemians introduce themselves. Séamus shows them his statuette. Áine discovers her necklace is missing. Persy, under the influence, has "found himself" and proceeds to manhandle the members of the dance band. The missing necklace is found in his possession. Tadhg and Micilín seem anxious to break the engagement between Tadhg and Máire. Tadhg pretends to be jealous of Máire's solicitous attentions to the stricken Persy, but the ruse fails.

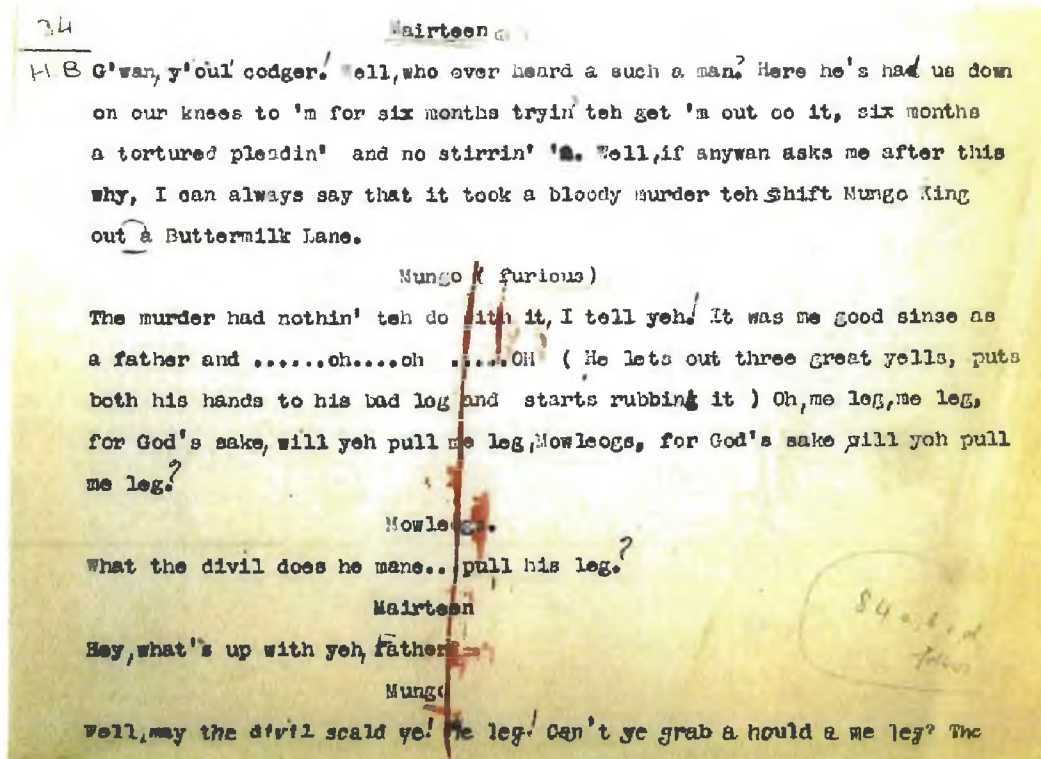
## *ACT III*

The night before the wedding. Tadhg and Máire are in a despondent mood. Máire is worried about Persy, who has been manhandling newspaper reporters and photographers and has been that day in court. The family, the guests (our three bohemians) and the two Spiddal men retire. The butler informs Nóra that the room is haunted. She passes on the information to Persy, who has arrived on Bean Uí Néill's instructions. He is not impressed and proceeds to bed down on the sofa. When he is asleep, the safe is burgled. Persy awakes and arouses the household. The statuettes and Áine's necklace have been stolen. They are discovered in Nóra's suitcase. It then transpires that Nóra is Micilín's daughter, that she and Tadhg are in love but that she had to come to Dublin after a lover's quarrel. Tadhg had become engaged to Máire for the sake of getting to Dublin to find Nóra. Bean Uí Néill arranged the robbing to bring matters to a head, the butler acting as burglar. Máire discovers that it is really Persy that she loves. The butler does make off with the statuette, but Bean Uí Néill announces that he has only got a replica made on her instructions by Bigin. The two pairs of lovers are left to sort themselves out.

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## Appendix 6.5

Act 3, page 29 from *Mungo and the Mowleogs*, Wuppertal Manuscript Folder 55.



The published version of this script repeats verbatim Mairteen's lines, as above, and continues with Mungo's line:

...The murder had nothin' teh do with it, I tell yeh! It's oney because I'm a good father that has the well-bein' oo,s children at heart, that's all..... (1946, 102)

Removed during the re-write were the lines about 'his bad leg' and these may have led to the miracle. These lines are marked-out in red in this extract.

## Appendix 6.6

### Casts: First productions of some of the Macken plays

#### 1. *Mungo's Mansion*

Opened on the 11 February 1946 at the Abbey Theatre, Dublin, (Robinson, 176, 1951).

The cast was:

Mungo King .....	F. J. McCormack
Mairteen, his son .....	Micheal O'Briain
Nellie, his daughter .....	Siobhan Nic Chionnaith
Willie Gilhealy	
(Winnie of the Wild Ducks) .....	Eileen Crowe
Mr. Skerret .....	Michael J. Dolan
Mowleogs Canavan .....	Harry Brogan
Jack Manders .....	Dennis O'Dea
Mrs. Manders, his wife .....	Brid Ni Loinsigh
The Doctor .....	Fred Johnson

The setting was by Alicia Sweetman

#### 2. *Home is the Hero*

Opened on the 28 July 1952 and was produced by The Abbey Theatre at the Queen's Theatre. ([http://www.irishplayography.com/search/play.asp?play\\_id=1382](http://www.irishplayography.com/search/play.asp?play_id=1382))

Original Cast:

Dovetail	Harry Brogan
Daylia	Eileen Crowe
Manchester	Bill Foley
Trapper Flynn	Edward Golden
Bid	Marie Kean
Mrs. Green	Brid Lynch
Willie	Micheal O hAonghusa
Josie	Ita O' Mahony
Lily Green	Joan O'Hara
Paddo	Brian O'Higgins

Production Team:

Settings by	Vere Dudgeon
Produced by	Ria Mooney



**3. *Twilight of a Warrior:***

Opened on the 21 November 1955 and was produced by The Abbey Theatre at the Queen's Theatre. ([http://www.irishplayography.com/search/play.asp?play\\_id=1382](http://www.irishplayography.com/search/play.asp?play_id=1382))

Original Cast:

Affy Adam	Harry Brogan
Ross Adam	Vincent Dowling
Dr. Hector Gillanders	Geoff Golden
Gubby Adam	Marie Kean
Nessa Adam	Brid Lynch
Dacey Adam	Ray McAnally
Elva Adam	Maire Ni Dhomhnaill
Abel Martin	Micheal O hAonghusa
Sergeant Festy Brudar	Micheal O'Briain

Production Team:

Settings by	Michael O'Herlihy
Produced by	Edward Golden
Stage Manager	Sean Mooney(2)

**4. *Look in The Looking Glass:***

The play opened on the 10 March 1958, produced by The Abbey Theatre at the Queen's Theatre. ([http://www.irishplayography.com/search/play.asp?play\\_id=1382](http://www.irishplayography.com/search/play.asp?play_id=1382))

Original cast:

Capt. O'Flaherty	Harry Brogan
Mary Moran	Eileen Crowe
Stopper Collins	Edward Golden
Sarah Stevens	Brid Lynch
Siveen	Doreen Madden
Turloc O'Connor	T.P. McKenna
Mico Moran	Micheal O hAonghusa
Ceolaun Maloney	Micheal O'Briain
Peter Moran	Philip O'Flynn
Janey	Joan O'Hara

Production Team:

Settings by Tomás MacAnna
Produced by Ria Mooney
Stage Director Sean Mooney(2)

### 5. *The Voices of Doolin*

Opened at the Gaiety Theatre on the 15 September 1960 and was produced by Cyril Cusack Productions.

Original Cast:

Doolin	Cyril Cusack*
Beesy	Maureen O'Sullivan *
Trumpet	John McDarby *
Morgan Cumisky	Jack Aronson *

Other parts, from the BUW pre-Gaiety programme were:

Joan O'Hara (Rose)  
Kitty Fitzgerald (Julia)  
Nora Grey (Claire)  
Derek Young (Declan)

Director: Jim Fitzgerald\*

Setting: Molly McEwan\*

\* Names from *The Irish Times* review 16 September 1960, page 9

## Appendix 6.7

Walter Macken's handwritten dedication and cast list for Mungo's Mansion. The copy is from the galley proofs (BUW Folder 55).

*(Dedication)* To my wife Peggy this Play, as a  
small reward for forbearance.

2) This play was first performed in the Abbey  
Theatre, Dublin, on February 11, 1946, with the  
following cast -

MUNGO KING	=	F. J. McCOOMICK
MARTEN	=	MICHAEL C. BRIAN
NELLIE	=	<del>SIOBHAN</del> SIOBHAN NÍ CHIONAITH
NINNIE GILHEALY	=	EILEEN CROWE
MISTER SKERRET	=	MICHAEL J. DOLAN
KNOWLEDGE	=	HARRY BREGAN
JACK MANDERS	=	DENIS O' DEA
MRS MANDERS	=	BRID NÍ LOINSIGH
THE DOCTOR	=	FRED JOHNSON

The PLAY produced by F. DERMODY

3) "Permission to produce this play may be  
obtained from The Author, the Gaelic Theatre,  
Lyonsway"

## Appendix 6.8

### The Boys Come Home.

#### The People of the Play.

John Owen ( Johnno.)

Maggie, his wife.

Oscar. '

Declan. ' their three sons.

Eoin. ' ,

Festy. ' ,

Pakey. ' their workers.

Breedeen. ' ,

Sarah. ' ,

Major Durham.

Mrs Durham.

Judy, their daughter.

MR. Connolly.

Agnes, his wife.

Claire, their daughter.

Jeannie.

---

The Place.

The Owen Hotel in Connemara.

The Time.

The Present.

## Appendix 6.9

The final scene for *Three Days in the Gantry*, Act 3, page 31. The closing song is *If I were a Blackbird*.

Kattieson.

Look, Fixit, we'll sit down nice and oozy here while Delia Murphy wafts sweet music at us and you will tell me all and everything that happened last night. ( He indicates the bucket seat to fixit, who moves towards it obviously tryin' hard to decide between two loyalties, loyalty to see-ree whom he likes, and loyalty to the Sergeant who probably saved him from a severe beating and who he also likes. He is sitting down, and Delia Murphy is starting to sing "If I were a Blackbird " on the record as

The Curtain Falls.

BUW Manuscript Nr. 100

*Vacant Possession* actual ending with *Sure a little bit of Heaven fell from out the sky one day* as the closing song. Act 3, page 23

Fixit.

Key, Rivinge ! ( Revenge turns towards him.) Lookit I owe yeh nine bob, don't it well, I'm goin' teh give it back t' yeh. Lookit, I'm goin' t' lave yeh the oul' grammyphone. What more can I do for yeh ? You can hook it, can't yeh, and get fifteen bob on it. It's all yours, Rivinge, I'd don't want it anymore, not after this. Lookit, I'll even put on a record for yeh, and I'll do more, I'll wind up the oul' yoke ( he does so), and I'll play it for yeh. There y'are, Rivinge. Y' wanted a revenge and now yeh can have it. ( He backs back to the doorway as the record starts to play.) Goodbye, Rivinge, and let ye make a good job a kneekin' down the oul' Ganthry. Don't lave a stone on a stone oo it, because yeer pullin' down the freedom a man on top a year own dirty heads. Let ye sing at yeer work a pullin' down the oul' Ganthry, because the Ganthry is Guded and so is the rights a the common people. Let ye wave yeer green flags over its grave and sing a Hallelujah whin yeer blinded in its dust. Let ye give great shouts outa ye because yeer kneekin' the props from under democracy, and it'll fall like a corpse under the foundations a the Galsey Ganthry. Democracy? How are yeh ! And he departs joining in with the words of the song on the record. Revenge looks first at the gramophone with his mouth open, and then looks after Fixit. He runs to the door shouting, " Fixit, Fixit", and the curtain falls, as a large lump of plaster is hit from the ceiling. The baritone on the record is singing feelingly, " Sure a little bit of Heaven fell from out the sky one day", and the curtain finally descends. The harp. " They called it Ire-a-e-e-land".

(BUW Manuscript folder 107)

Macken's alternative ending for *Vacant Possession* using *The Soldiers Song* as the closing song. Act 3, page 23

Fixit.

Hey, Revving! ( Revenge turns but does not stop the whistling! I owe yeh nine bob, don't I? Well I'm goin' teh give yeh yer owl nine bob. Lookit I'll ~~xxxxxx~~ have yeh this gramophone. Now what more can I do. Yeh can hock it for about thirty bob. Its all yourse Revving. I don't want it any more, an' lookit, I'll evern put on a record for yeh, an' I'll do more, I'll wind up the owl yoke (he does so) an' I'll play it for yeh. There y'are Revving. You wanted Revving an' now yeh can have it. (He backs back t the doorway as the record starts to play ) Goodbye Revving. Let ye make a good job o' knockin' down the owl Ganthry. Don't have a stone on a stone do it, because yeer pullin' the freedom o' man down on top o' yer own dirty heads. The Ganthry is done an' so is the common people. Teh hell with ye, Revving an' teh hell with the Ganthry. Holy Mother o' God, democracy , how are yeh '. ( and he departs. Revenge looks after him first and then at the gramophone, in amazement. The record is "The Soldiers Song". He then runs up to the door shouting, " Heya Fixit, Fixit", and the curtain falls as a large lump of plaster falls from the ceiling over the fireplace. )

(BUW Manuscript folder 68)



## Appendix 6.10

The City Tribune, 23 July 1993

# A play for true Galwegians

by EIBHIR MULQUEEN

A play for true Galwegians, Vacant Possession at UCG's Aula Maxima conjured up such exotic nameplaces like Shanghai and the Burma Road which go unrecognised by the blow-ins.

Walter Macken's play, written in 1948, had his son, Ultan, play a small role as the landlord, Revenge Horgan, in

Sighle Meehan's production which ended last night.

The cast of characters is colourful and it was fitting that Galwegians played the roles in a 40 year-old setting when the accents were more pronounced.

The play's title is apt in that it centres on a derelict condemned house, temporarily possessed by a poverty-stricken group who have fallen short on rent payments but who do not even have squatters'

rights to the property.

The one-legged, unemployed and former soldier Gunner Delaney, played by Padraic McGinley, summed up the pathos of the situation when he said he was the lonliest man in Europe when the war ended.

Mike Kelly, playing Fixit Maloney, is the backbone of the group, who remains through to his alcoholic friend, Gunner, and tries to resolve his crumbling material circumstance with his belief in democracy.

But the Gunner's wife (Claire Moloney) was the quintessential Galway woman in her very appearance and a fine performance completed the effect.

The main plot centres on the Garda's (John Heneghan) search for a thief after a house robbery is committed and a dog poisoned. But in the midst of the often raised emotions, Joe Dillon, as the Gabbler Blake, appears as an unobtrusive old man happy to be in his home town — ostensibly at least.

It is, however, a dated script for a younger audience to appreciate but if you like traditional works, you would have enjoyed it.

With good performances by all, including John Glynn, Paul Muldrew and Denise Hogan, it was a production which belied the amateur status of the players.

# Irish films

al Arts Council Script ssional looking, it prove that talking the d technicians in the on a short film does it is going to work. missed the ending. I

most rules was A as an hilarious spoof subject. It took the ning that sometimes sly and for that alone Besides, it was well on the head in a few wks had not been ys would get life

to Horse. We sat gs of the good, the re seeing a film that ul and coherent. But

it was worth the wait.

Kevin Liddy's half hour film was imbued with themes and concerns that had literary precedents in Macken, McGahern, Kavanagh and others but you never felt like shouting cliché. Shot in an episodic, engaging style this was an excerpt from the life of Michael, a motherless boy in rural Cavan in the 1970s.

The harsh realities of the world around him are coming home to him as he is struggling to find a sole identity for himself in a country that is still struggling to come to terms with its own self determination. Hero worship, history, role models and failure are some of the layers in this film which contains moments of beauty and is also beautiful to look at.

John Kavanagh, as usual, is excellent as are Mick Lally, Ruaidhri Conroy and Pat Leavy. Deservedly, it took the Best New Short award.

## Appendix 6.11



### H. M. TENNENT LTD.

DIRECTORS: F.A.S. Gwatkin (Chairman) Hugh Beaumont (Managing Director)  
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Telegraphic Address  
TENMONT, LESQUARE,  
LONDON.

Cable  
TENMONT, LONDON.

Walter Macken Esq.,  
Abbey Theatre,  
Dublin,  
EIRE.

29th September, 1949.

Dear Walter,

I am returning "TYPES AND SHADOWS", which I have read.

I quite liked it, but I think it is terribly over-written. How you are going to do the end of the play, I really can't imagine. Frankly, at the moment I am a bit off Irish plays, except my own!

Yours very sincerely,

*John Perry*

## Appendix 6.12

The novel, *And Then No More*, was written on or before 1947 while the play covering the same subject, *Types and Shadows*, was written about 1948. The novel was rejected by Macmillan and Co in their letter to Macken dated 2 October 1947. The play received a similar verdict from Tennent's in September 1949, see **Appendix 6.11**.

The novel begins before Mabbina's wedding when the Major (Glenoola in the play) sees a wall painting by a self-taught artist and carpenter, Maelisa Ross. He engages Ross to paint a portrait of Mabbina for the wedding. Mabbina and Ross fall in love. This is unacceptable. Maelisa is banished and Mabbina marries Larry Stanley. From that point on the Mabbina's story in the novel and the play are more or less the same. Macken numbered his chapters consecutively for the Glenoola story in the novel and he also introduced short unnumbered chapters at intervals throughout the novel. These unnumbered chapters recount the adventures of the banished Maelisa Ross.

At the end of the play, during the Irish War of Independence, we see the villagers attack the 'Big House' and burn it to the ground. Eoin McCusker takes Mabbina, Ina and the servants to safety.

In the novel the house remains intact. Eoin marries Ina. They have a son, also named Eoin. When the Irish Civil War breaks out (1922-23) the local IRA split and Eoin joins the anti-treaty forces and is killed by accident by his own former comrades (Page 346). After his death Mabbina, Ina and Eoin (son) leave the valley. The 'Big House' is to be sold and the likely purchaser is Bawnog White, the shopkeepers son in both play and novel (Page 364).

On the journey from the valley their car, driven by Ina, breaks down. Returning at the same time to Glenoola is the now successful writer, Maelisa Ross. He stops to assist with the breakdown. Unable to repair the car, the women and Eoin agree to travel with Ross who is to take them to their destination. The writing here implies that Maelisa is the father of Ina (Page 396). Macken ties up all the loose ends with a happy ending, '... tight as a hobble skirt' (*Types and Shadows*, page 11).

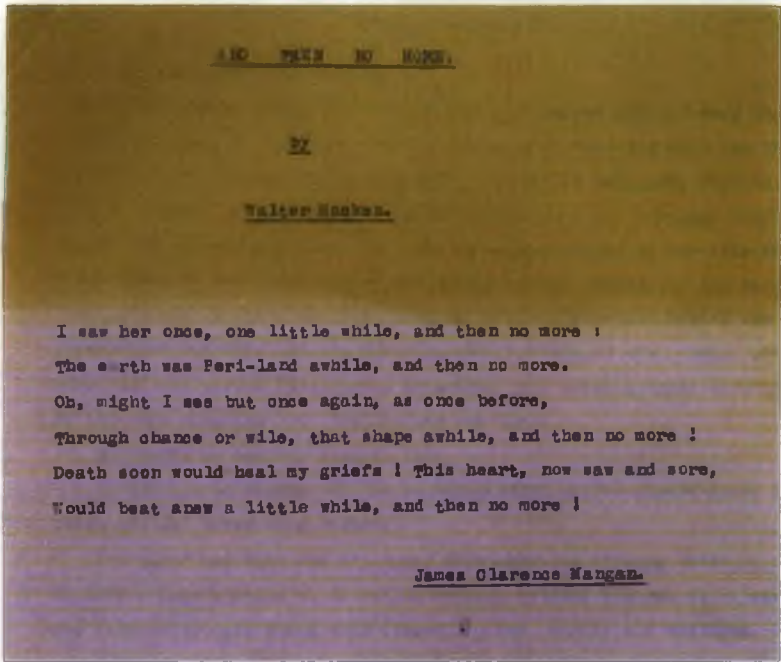
Macmillan did not like this parallel story, ‘Is it possible you wrote this part quite separately from the rest of the book?’ (Macken, 2009, 200)

**The Titles: *Types and Shadows* and *And Then No More*:**

It is Larry Stanley in the play that provides the explanation for the title *Types and Shadows* (Act 3, page 30)

I even went once to France to a Catholic Church where they were having what they call benediction. They were singing a hymn in Latin. It went with words in the middle that I got off by heart when I heard the meaning of them. These; Et antiquum documentum, novo cedat ritui. The meaning of them Mabbina; Types and shadows have their ending, newer rites of grace prevail.... I said Mabbina is a type and I’m a shadow. (See Footnote)

Macken introduces *And Then No More* with the James Clarence Mangan poem of the same name.



**Footnote:** Tantum Ergo by George Henschel (1850 – 1934) translates the relevant lines as: Et antiquum documentum novo cedat ritui: Types and shadows have their ending, for the newer rite is here. (<http://www.stbartholomews.ie/whatwesing/007-henschel.pdf>)

## **Chapter 7: Walter Macken, his time, his performances, his plays and his critics**

### **Appendices 7.1**



## Appendix 7.1

13.

to prevent any suggestion of a "type" from polluting the character. I should prefer him not to show this influence as I feel that Americanizing him may lessen an interesting personality.

Paddo — is the only tragic figure in the drama. The others emerge — Paddo is defeated. He has defeated himself, although he will never see this. He is one who has never controlled his strength power. He could have been great had he realized the strength (that is, the destructive strength) of his weakness. He may have remained undefeated had not another man (Green) realized this weakness. Paddo grew up in the midst of admiration — he was blessed with Nature's gifts — physical distinction plus a power of will. He has never organized his forces and thus, his strength he either abuses or loses when it is challenged by a determined adversary.



Daylia, his wife, is visible evidence of his power, but here again, by robbing her of all independence, he lost all chance of control when he was absent. He could have carried out his leadership to some extent if he had developed any balance between himself and her. When he returns he can control neither his own emotions nor those of anybody else. So he disintegrates. He makes wild attempts to enforce his will but inevitably he fails. There is only one hope for him — namely, if he could at least analyze himself and set about the task of rebuilding himself. But he is too far gone — his ways are set ~~in~~ a mould that is beyond change. And so he runs away, thus completing his own destruction.

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## Walter Macken (1915-1967) – Playwright, Actor and Theatre Manager

### Errata

Page 3: Four lines from bottom should read ‘... *Twilight of a Warrior* (1955)’.

Page 89: Seven lines down should read ‘...to move here or to move there,’

Page 140: Two lines up, correct spelling for Minor to Miner

Page 152: Last line, the page for Nathan’s reply is 146 not 145

Page 334: The page numbers on lines 11 up, 7 up and 2 up should read 156, 164 and 172.

Page 339: The page numbers on line 11 down should read 128 not 127.

After ‘Later writers...’ bottom of page 339 insert ‘(see page 2)....’

Page 341: The page numbers on line 8 down should read 62 and 337 and on lines 12 up and 9 up the page numbers should read 73 and 152.

Page 342: The page number on lines 10 up should read 78 not 77, on lines 7 up and 6 up the page numbers should read 76 and 77

Page 348: The page number on line 11 down should read 173 not 172.

Page 349: *Adam* and *Abel*, lines 11 and 10 up should be in *italics*.

Appendix 0.2: The photograph of Walter Stephen Macken is on page 12 of the thesis.

Appendix 2.15: The footnote mentioned on page 10 should read **Footnote 2.7**.

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